The Measurement of Wellbeing in Economics: Philosophical explorations

Het meten van welzijn in de economische wetenschap: filosofische verkenningen

Thesis

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Preface

It is now more than six and a half years ago, January 2011, I was 20, when I decided to apply to the research master of the Erasmus Institute for Philosophy and Economics (EIPE). I was torn between the job security and acclaim I imagined being an academic economist would have, and my passion for doing philosophy. Additionally, as a student, I had been much more successful in my economics courses, than the philosophy ones. EIPE seemed to be a good fit, but, it is at a philosophy faculty, and the courses were mostly philosophical. It was difficult to make a choice between different programs, but, while I struggled in the first semester, I am very glad now I decided to make the decision to go to EIPE.

Being the youngest and most junior in my year of four, with Philippe Verreault-Julien, Darian Heim, and Vaios Koliofotis, I learned a lot from my classmates. I learned a great deal from my teachers, in particular Jack Vromen, Marcel Boumans, Julian Reiss, Ingrid Robeyns and Conrad Heilmann, and the PhD students who were there during my time at EIPE, particularly Francois Claveau, Attilia Ruzzene, Thomas Wells, Sine Bagatur, Morten Byskov, and Melissa Vergara Fernandez. Constanze Binder, who was a postdoc when I arrived, has been a great counselor as well, with whom I share many research interests. Many of the ideas discussed in chapter 6 have been elaborately discussed with her. When writing my master's thesis – about the philosophy of statistical inference in econometrics – both Conrad Heilmann and Julian Reiss were incredibly helpful supervisors. EIPE has been central to my development, not only as an academic, but as a person.

In February 2014, I was offered the opportunity to continue my PhD at the Erasmus University, an opportunity I owe to Harry Commandeur, Werner Brouwer and Jack Vromen, who were very helpful and dedicated supervisors in the years to come. I am particularly grateful to Jack Vromen and Werner Brouwer, who took the main supervisory responsibility, while both were serving as deans of the Faculty of Philosophy and the Institute of Health Policy & Management (iBMG) respectively. Their counsel, encouragement, and (particularly in case of prof. Brouwer) jokes have been very valuable to me, as much in the beginning of the PhD writing process up until now.

Conrad Heilmann continued to offer much support during my PhD, during review meetings, by providing comments on my papers, and by offering advice on all things related to doing a PhD and life thereafter. When I thank him for the things he has done, he often points out that the has received much help from more senior people when he was a graduate student. I hope I will be able to continue this "chain of helpfulness".

Because of Job van Exel I was able to engage in an empirical project we did together that led to chapter 2 of this thesis. We presented this chapter in an early stage in a OECD workshop on the measurement of wellbeing in Turin in 2014. Doing this together was a great experience for me.

In the fall of 2015, I spent a term in Cambridge, visiting the history and philosophy of science department, supervised by Anna Alexandrova. I greatly benefited from this experience, and am very grateful for the time that Anna made available for me. The conversations I had with her, as well as with Elina Vessonen, helped me develop my thoughts a lot, which is particularly visible in chapter 7 of this thesis.

I am grateful to all audiences of conferences, workshops, and seminars where I have presented work. One particular place I want to mention is the peer-review circle, originally organized by Jojanneke Vanderveen for research master students in philosophy to present their work, but later turned into a place where PhD students in practical philosophy can present early ideas and papers. This group has been an enormous support, and I would particularly like to thanks Jojanneke Vanderveen, Huub Brouwer, Tjidde Tempels, Beatrijs Haverkamp, Andrea Gammon, and Daphne Brandenburg for being part of this group.

I am also grateful to Mark Chekola, who I met several times while he was visiting Rotterdam, for carefully reading my work and providing many insightful comments.

All my EIPE PhD colleagues, Caglar Osman Dede, James Grayot, Philippe Verreault-Julien, Huub Brouwer, Daphne Truijens, Melissa Vergara Fernandez, and Vaios Koliofotis at EIPE, Martijn Hendriks at EHERO and Mariska Hackert at iBMG have been great fellow travelers in the PhD writing process. Someone who belongs in this list is Christiaan Broekman, who has greatly inspired the consequentialist in me, in practice and theory.

My time as editor of the Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and economics has been educational for me. I thank Tom, Joost, Tyler,

Francois and Luis for giving me the opportunity to do this, and Philippe, Huub, Caglar, and Erwin for being great colleagues.

On the evening of 3 September 2015, I was ready to go to bed when I quickly checked my email and saw I had received a message from a journal I had submitted to, that suggested that major revisions were required before my article (now chapter 4 of this thesis) could be published. I started to nervously read through the comments as I was telling Nina about the news. Nina started to congratulate me (jump on the bed), and took my phone to start reading the comments that I was too nervous to read through, meanwhile elaborately reporting all the nice comments that the referees had provided, and briefly summarizing the critical ones. This scene depicts very well what Nina has meant to me in the writing of this thesis. It has been a struggle to write this thesis. Nina has been my calm retreat when it became too hectic, and a reason to keep writing when I felt there were none left. Without Nina, I would not have been able to finish this project.

Lastly, my family and friends, to whom I also owe debt that goes much beyond this thesis: my parents – who are always there for me –, Hannah – who has always been my example –, Pieter – who is both a brother and a friend –, Marleen – who has been making me laugh since 1990 –, Emma – my partner in politics – and Roos – whose moral conscience turned me vegan –, Robert, Anneke, Rob, Michiel, Philippe, Genevieve, Huub, Sophie, Michel, Laura and Floris. Thanks.

Chapter 1: Introduction

What is the best life for you? Is it better for you to spend a lot of time and energy in your career so you can be successful at it, or is it better to spend it leisurely on friends, family and romantic partners? Should you spend your money on a new game computer, or is it better to save up for a vacation with friends? Is it better for you to be a parent and raise a family, or to be childless and have more freedom? Such questions are not only important in our own lives, but make a difference for policymakers as well. They may wonder whether it is better for its citizens to improve the quality of air in cities, or improve the accessibility of cars? Is it better for the people if medicine research is funded or if taxes are cut? And in particular, such questions play a role in ethical decision making, when we are concerned with the wellbeing of others. For example, in the context of generational justice, is it worse for future generations that we leave them with a large financial debt, or is it worse to leave them with a warmer climate than ours in which biodiversity has been much reduced?

Such questions can be considered very personal. Perhaps, as some self-help books may suggest, it is best to follow your gut feelings if it comes to such choices. But this is rather unsatisfactory if you want to make a rational decision about these important questions. Moreover, we may not want to leave something as important as the decision to counter climate change or not to a feeling in our gut. Perhaps, in order to answer these questions, we need science. If science could tell me that I would be better-off spending time on leisure rather than on my career, it would be irrational to ignore this. If so, and my job does not involve something of great social value, it may even be irrational for me to choose to work hard.

Like all sciences, a science of wellbeing has to deal with methodological caveats. It may be that it would be good for me to spend much time on my career, but that the same does not apply to you. However, such considerations always play a role when we think about causal relationships. Smoking may cause cancer in me, but not in you. But to a science of wellbeing, there are also a number of unique problems attached. This thesis sets out to answer to what extent it is feasible to scientifically study questions about wellbeing. But before I explain what

kind of concerns may arise about a science of wellbeing, it is good to first explain the notion of wellbeing in some more detail, and go over some of its history in economics and philosophy.

The concept of wellbeing describes how good life is for the person who is living it. So, your wellbeing is how your good life is for *you* (Tiberius 2006). This concept is related closely to the concept of "the good life", and to the concept of happiness. Throughout this thesis I will distinguish these three concepts in the following way. While the concept of wellbeing refers only to prudential value—that is, value, only *for* you—the concept of the good life is broader and also includes moral value. The concept of the good life presents an answer to the question How should one life? So, on some views on wellbeing it is possible that a cruel mobster who enjoys a comfortable life with everything he needs and without feelings of torment is leading a life high on wellbeing, while we would not say that this person is leading the good life. No one should live the life of a cruel mobster, as it is obviously morally bad. There are some substantive views on wellbeing (such as some Aristotelian views) that maintain that what is good *for* you cannot be immoral. On these views doing immoral things is not only bad ethically, but also harms one's own wellbeing. On such a substantive view, the two concepts end up being the same. However, for the purpose of clarity, we will separate these two concepts throughout the thesis.

Furthermore, the concept of wellbeing is distinct from the concept of happiness. Happiness is a reference to a psychological state. If we say we are happy, we are describing what our psychological state is. While there are some theories of wellbeing that restrict what wellbeing is to psychological states, not all of them do. For example, in one well-known view on wellbeing it does not only matter whether we are happy, but that the source of our happiness must also be real (or authentic, see Sumner 1996). While in almost all cases happiness plays a role to wellbeing, not in all cases is happiness the only things that matters to wellbeing.

Where we are in philosophy: A short history of wellbeing

Discussions about the good life, wellbeing, and happiness, while not always clearly distinguished, have a long history. Aristotle maintained that a good life is a virtuous life, and the best of lives is the contemplative life. Aristotle used the term *Eudaimonia* to describe a good life. This term is often translated to happiness, but Aristotle rejected the idea that happiness consists in pleasure, but rather, to Aristotle, happiness is the

fulfilment of one's human nature. Around the same time, Epicurus proclaimed that one should live in accordance with finding pleasure in simple things in life, such as friendships. The classic Greek philosophers generally were in pursuit of the good life. They now only sought to find an answer to the question What is a good life for you?, but also to the question What is a good life in general? Ideas developed by these ancient philosophers still have their influence and counterparts in contemporary debates.

The philosophical debate on wellbeing is also highly influenced by 19th century utilitarian philosophers Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and, in much lesser degree, Henry Sidgwick. While Epicurus believed one should live to strive for one's own happiness, utilitarians developed the idea that one should live to maximize the happiness of all. While they all agreed that happiness consists in pleasure, they had widely differing views on what pleasure was. While Bentham (1789) had a very liberal view on pleasure in which any type of felt pleasure differs only in terms of its quantity, intensity and ability to bring about further pleasure, Mill (1871) also believed that pleasures were qualitatively different, and that qualitatively better pleasures are more valuable. For Mill, reading poetry was qualitatively more pleasurable than playing the simple game of push-pin. Sidgwick (1907) again, denied this, but believed that pleasure was a feeling that was apprehended as desirable, leaving space for valuational differences without incorporating categories of pleasure.

Hedonism espoused by the 19th century utilitarians led to a large critical discussion. Hedonism was mostly confronted with two important objections. The first is whether it could properly distinguish between sophisticated human lives and lives filled with simplistic (or even animalistic) pleasures: the philosophy of swine problem. While this problem was exactly the kind of problem Mill wanted to solve with the introduction of qualitative hedonism, many, such as G.E. Moore (1903), raised doubts about whether such a move could be justified without acknowledging other values in life besides pleasure.

A second problem was introduced by Robert Nozick (1974), who posed his argument in the form of a thought-experiment. Imagine that one can plug into a machine that generates the most amazing experiences. Plugged into the machine one can have great experiences while forgetting that one is plugged into a machine. Can someone who spends her life in the machine have a prudentially good life? If not,

pleasure cannot be the only thing that matters to wellbeing, but whether experiences are real or not must make a difference as well.

As a result of these problems, hedonism lost ground as a mainstream philosophical view on wellbeing. In Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons* (1984) he took stock of the main views on wellbeing in philosophy. Besides hedonism, he identified desire-satisfactionism and objective list theories as other important branches of wellbeing theories. Desire-satisactionism (Rawls 1971; Railton 1986) is the view that wellbeing consists in the satisfaction of desires. Many philosophical accounts of desire-satisfactionism maintain that in order for a satisfied desire to contribute to wellbeing, it should be a well-informed, rational desire. Different from hedonism, desire-satisfactionism is not a mental-state view. If one has a desire, and the world corresponds to it, one's life is made better, regardless of whether one knows this is the case. So, if one has a desire for one's experience to be real, living in the experience machine frustrates this desire, even if those experiences feel good and one never learns finds out.

Objective list theories on the other hand, list a number of goods that make a life go well that are independent of whether a person desires these goods. Sometimes, but not always, such theories are based on Aristotelian conceptions of the good life, in which fulfilling one's nature is what it means for someone's life to go well. Martha Nussbaum's list of capabilities one needs to have for a fully human life (Nussbaum 2011) is sometimes considered to be such an Aristotelian objective list theory of wellbeing. Another list states that wellbeing consists in Achievement, Friendship, Happiness, Pleasure, Self-Respect, and Virtue (Fletcher 2013). So, even if you do not value friendship, this objective list theory maintains that friendship makes your life go better.

Even after over 33 years, Parfit's taxonomy is a good guide to the main views within the philosophical literature on wellbeing. While there are many hybrid views—such as preference-hedonism (Heathwood 2006)—or views that, on the surface, fit poorly within this framework—such as value-based views (Tiberius 2008), the taxonomy still plays an important role in structuring the discussion.

Where we are in economics

For much of its history, economics was considered a moral science, concerned with the question how best to manage the state, and one's personal life. Economics is, in an important sense, a science concerned

with value. Its language is tainted with notions pertaining to personal value, such as benefit, utility, better off, development, and welfare. Most central of all is the notion of utility. This central notion is nevertheless not completely unambiguous. John Neville Keynes first distinguished two branches of economics: positive and normative economics; the former being concerned with matters of fact about the economy and economic behavior, the latter with questions of normativity, how the economy should be. The latter does not only bear on matters of facts, but also pertains to matters of value.

Utility plays a role in both branches of economics. In positive economics, utility is the mathematical representation of the preferences of an agent (Fumagalli 2013). Such preferences can be inferred from how people actually choose. Utility in this sense is a tool to help to explain (and possibly predict) economic behavior. If it comes to normative questions, utility is a normative notion, capturing an important sense of value. More of it is considered better than less. Utility is used as a term that stands at par with wellbeing, or, as economists say: welfare. These two usages of utility may, but need not, coincide.

Economists in the 19th century did not make this distinction, and with them Mill and Bentham used the term utility synonymously with wellbeing and happiness. Many economists went along with Bentham and Mill's idea (Mill himself being a renowned economist) that utility was synonymous with pleasure (and the absence of pain). One such economist was Frances Edgeworth (1881), who explicated his vision that one day, utility could be measured by means of a hedonimeter: a device that could measure from our physiology how much pleasure we are experiencing (see Colander 2007). However, in the beginning of the 20th century—perhaps under the influence of logical-empiricist strands in philosophy—more skepticism emerged towards the place of something as intangible as pleasure in economics. In an influential book on economics, Lionel Robbins (1932) dismissed pleasure as a scientific concept because of its personal nature: "*There is no means of testing the magnitude of A's satisfaction as compared with B's.* If we tested the state of their blood-streams, that would be a test of blood, not satisfaction. Introspection does not enable A to discover what is going on in B's mind, nor B to discover what is going on in A's" (Robbins 1932 [original emphasis]).

In the new welfare economics that developed, economics shifted towards a preference-satisfaction approach to utility. In this approach, the possibility of making interpersonal comparisons of welfare or utility

is excluded. It became a common understanding that the degree of preference-satisfaction is not something that can meaningfully be compared among individuals. While an economist may judge that an increase in opportunities to choose (for example, through an increase in income) may increase someone's welfare, no judgment is made about how one person's welfare compares to that of someone else.

While this preference-based view was, and still is, the mainstream view in economics, in recent decades the debate about how wellbeing should be conceived of and measured in economics has resurfaced. A first camp that started to question this hegemony, questioned Robbins' very skepticism about the ability to measure happiness. Starting from Richard Easterlin's seminal work in the 1970's (Easterlin 1974), a literature emerged in economics that took a central idea from psychology: measuring happiness or life satisfaction through self-reports on a fixed scale—called measures of subjective wellbeing (SWB). While this view acknowledges that such measures may be imperfect, defenders point out many measurements used in (social) scientific practice are imperfect, and that measures of SWB actually result in plausible statistical relationships with related concepts. This strand, which has particularly been growing since the late 1990's, is now called happiness economics. Chapter 3 and 4 engage with this literature in economics.

A second strand that started to question the preference-satisfaction hegemony started from philosopher-economist Amartya Sen (1985a, 1992, 1999, 2009), who argued that measures of preference-satisfaction, as well as desire and happiness-based measures, are too heavily reliant on people's aspirations and wants, which are mutable. Particularly in the context of policy-guidance, this may lead to unfair assessments of people's wellbeing. Amartya Sen particularly argues that those in the worst of situations may adapt their aspirations downwards, and consequently be satisfied with little, but this should not mean that their lives are good for them. This criticism plays a central role in chapter 3. As an alternative, Sen, together with other utility-critical scholars in economics and philosophy (particularly Nussbaum 2000, 2011), proposed to evaluate wellbeing within the more concrete space of things that people are and things they do—so called functionings—and the opportunity to achieve this—so called capabilities. The capability approach that emerged from this has led to a development of measures concerning wellbeing broadly construed—such as poverty, social progress, and development. One notable example of its yields is the well-

known human development index. This approach plays a central role in chapter 6.

Wellbeing as an object of economic investigation

The question this thesis is engaged with is: To what extent can wellbeing successfully be an object of scientific investigation within economics? In order to understand this question, it is important to keep in mind the different contexts and purposes for which wellbeing is used (Alexandrova 2012b, 2015). In particular, someone may be interested in the question what wellbeing is without having any particular application in mind. The philosophical debate about wellbeing can be crudely characterized as such. In this case one is merely interested in the necessary and sufficient conditions for wellbeing. In the scientific context, one is not merely interested in the best conception of wellbeing, but also in the possibility of making such conceptions measurable. For example, Robbins's reasons for rejecting hedonism as a view on welfare in economics discussed above was not that it is an implausible view on wellbeing, but rather that it was practically impossible to use it as an object of scientific investigation. Another reason why one may be interested in wellbeing is to use it as a guide for policy. If a policymaker wants to device a policy aimed at the worst off in society, it may be required to have criteria about who the worst off are. In such a policy-context it may be particularly important that a measure one employs is accurate, and not only avoids structural mismeasurements, but also avoids vulnerability to deliberate manipulation.

This thesis is primarily concerned with the second purpose: measuring wellbeing for purely scientific purposes. However, it is no secret that many economists interested in the concept of wellbeing are not merely interested for positive reasons, but are motivated by their aim to provide policy recommendations. Some happiness economists have explicitly endorsed utilitarianism as a guide to policy (Veenhoven 2004). Capabilitarian theories are often applied in the context of policy-guidance as well. Moreover, in both these cases, the purely theoretical question of what wellbeing really is, is never far away. While in some cases disagreements between contenders of measures of wellbeing are centered around limited measurability of certain concepts, often they are reducible to disagreement about the nature of wellbeing.

In table 1.1 these different contexts of investigation are summarized. Philosophical theories of wellbeing aim to develop views

that are axiologically correct. Axiological means "pertaining to value". In the context of wellbeing, being axiologically correct means that it correctly specifies what makes our life go well for us. Philosophical accounts thus aim to be correct about what wellbeing is—without being concerned with whether they are empirically accessible. Measuremental accounts of wellbeing, on the other hand, are concerned with both these things. In case of policy-guiding accounts of wellbeing, the standards are different again. In terms of the axiological adequacy required for such accounts, it highly depends on the type of account. For example, Martha Nussbaum's list of capabilities that all societies should guarantee to their citizens relies on wellbeing, but does not require to us to know exactly how well off each individual in society; but only that they have sufficient capabilities to achieve it. Happiness economists who endorse utilitarianism as a policy aim are committed to the view that wellbeing is close enough to measures of subjective wellbeing, and that we can measure it well enough to get at reliable estimates of aggregate wellbeing.

While many measuremental accounts of wellbeing often are closely related to philosophical accounts of wellbeing, or often take on such an account, there are also important differences. Hedonism is not the same as subjective wellbeing (see chapter 4), and objective measures of wellbeing are not the same as objective list theories (further discussed in chapter 7).

Table 1.1

	Axiological adequacy requirement	**epistemic accessibility requirement**	Examples
Philosophical theories of wellbeing	Yes	No	Hedonism, (informed) desire-satisfactionism, objective list theories
Measuremental accounts to wellbeing	Yes	Yes	Subjective wellbeing, preference-satisfaction measures
Policy-guiding accounts of wellbeing	Yes, but with respect to aspects of wellbeing that are relevant for policy.	Yes, estimates about aggregate wellbeing should be possible, and particularly, should not be vulnerable to deliberate manipulation.	Utilitarian SWB advocates, Martha Nussbaum's capability list.

Look ahead

A first chapter is a co-written exploratory piece, which is an empirical investigation in people's conceptions about their own wellbeing. In the chapters that follow I first treat the most prominent measuremental accounts of wellbeing in the context of economics. I first assess to what extent the concept of happiness allows for self-assessed measurement, such as is standard in happiness economics (chapter 3 and 4), I then analyze to what extent recent proposals to measure wellbeing by means of preference-satisfaction succeed (chapter 5), and to what extent the capability approach can offer a feasible alternative to such approaches (chapter 6). In this part of the thesis (chapter 3-6), I almost exclusively focus on epistemic problems within the three approaches. Taking for granted the axiological commitments of such accounts, I assess to what extent they can provide us with successful measures of wellbeing. However, one crucial philosophical problem with measures of wellbeing is that philosophy is deeply divided on the question what the nature of

wellbeing is. The adequacy of such wellbeing measures in general depends (among other things) on their axiological adequacy. Chapter 7 assesses this problem, which I call the problem of conceptual uncertainty. In the conclusion (chapter 8), I get back to my research question, and reflect on the significance of these problems in light of the status of wellbeing as an object of economic investigation. While some of the arguments presented may espouse some pessimism with respect to this status, I suggest that overall skepticism may not be warranted. However, an equivalent of Edgeworth's hedonimeter to measure wellbeing across (economic) contexts and purposes—a welfarimeter, if you will—may not yet be around the corner.

Chapter 2: What Constitutes Wellbeing?

Five views on 'a good life' of people from the Netherlands.[1]

1. Introduction

More and more social scientists are committed to the view that it is important and worthwhile to measure wellbeing. A particular interest in this effort is taken by policy makers. A significant example is former French President Nicolas Sarkozy's Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, who wrote a report on the matter that received much attention in academics as well as in policy circles (Fitoussi, Sen, and Stiglitz 2009), or former UK Prime Minister David Cameron's initiative to measure and promote national wellbeing in the UK (Matheson 2011). Wellbeing is a complex and controversial subject, but the currently vivid debate about wellbeing seems to concur on one aspect: income is not a satisfactory measure of wellbeing. The debate about how we should conceptualize wellbeing in a policy context, if we are to go "beyond GDP", is ongoing (see Bruni, Comim, and Pugno 2008; Fleurbaey 2009; van Hoorn, Mabsout, and Sent 2010; Bleys 2012; Decancq and Schokkaert 2016). Two strands of literature have been particularly influential in the debate: the capability approach, initiated by Amartya Sen (Sen 1985a, 1992, 1999, 2009, Nussbaum 2000, 2003, 2011; Robeyns 2005; Deneulin and Shahani 2009), and the subjective wellbeing (SWB)—or happiness—approach, (Easterlin 1974, 1995; Veenhoven 2004; Layard 2005; Dolan, Peasgood, and White 2008). While the debate is ongoing, many policy institutions have taken a multi-dimensional route in which wellbeing is measured multi-dimensionally, with subjective happiness measures as one of the dimensions (e.g. Fitoussi, Sen, and

[1] This chapter is based on the paper 'What constitutes well-being? Five views on 'a good life' of people from the Netherlands.' Co-authored with Job van Exel, Werner Brouwer, and Maximilian Held.

Stiglitz 2009; Durand 2015). Examples include the UK wellbeing wheel of measures[2], the OECD Better Life Index[3], and the EU Quality of Life Index.[4]

While the literature on subjective wellbeing tends to consider people's own evaluations of their life as constitutive of—or as good evidence for—wellbeing, it is divided, firstly, on whether such evaluations should be about direct experiences of pleasure (Kahneman et al. 2004) or as more cognitive evaluations of life as a whole (Binder 2014). Secondly, whether wellbeing should be measured by one unidimensional SWB measure (Veenhoven 2004), or whether SWB is just one among several dimensions of wellbeing (Diener et al. 1985) remains controversial as well.

The capability approach is more explicit in taking wellbeing to be inherently multi-dimensional, with the dimensions being functionings—doings and beings—and capabilities—real freedoms to such functionings—that people have reason to value (Sen 1985a; Nussbaum 2011; Robeyns 2016). However, authors within the capability approach are divided about the following two questions that are central the formulation of a multi-dimensional wellbeing measure:

1. Which capabilities and functionings constitute wellbeing?
2. How should these different capabilities and functionings be weighed against each other?

As a response to the first question, Martha Nussbaum has famously argued for a specific list of capabilities, while Amartya Sen maintains that the set of functionings should be determined by public deliberation. In light of the difficulty such proposals leave for the second question, in developing capability-based wellbeing measures, some have controversially used life-satisfaction in empirical practice (Anand et al. 2009; cf. Richardson 2015). While it is acknowledged among at least some capability scholars that empirical input on people's personal values can be valuable in this debate[5] (e.g. Alkire 2007; Van Ootegem and

[2] See: https://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/measuring-national-well-being/first-annual-report-on-measuring-national-well-being/rpt---national-well-being-wheel-of-measures.pdf

[3] See: http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org.

[4] See: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/infographs/qol/index_en.html.

[5] Sen (1985, 2009) has expressed skepticism about subjective approaches to identifying well-being on numerous occasions, but has acknowledged the evidential value of well-deliberated views (see chapter 6).

Spillemaeckers 2010), few have attempted to investigate the different conceptions of wellbeing that people have empirically.[6]

In this study we aim to empirically investigate the aspects of life that people believe to be constitutive to their wellbeing—personal wellbeing values (Haybron and Tiberius 2015). Personal wellbeing values are different from preferences in that they are more stable, more abstract, and involve the quality of our own lives (as compared to some other values people may hold). For example, people may have a *preference* to eat fast-food, while they *value* a healthy life style. We believe knowing more about these values can help fill the indeterminacy of wellbeing constructs in both approaches to wellbeing measurement discussed above. However, the normative framework we employ is minimal. We explicitly do not take a stance on the nature of wellbeing. However, irrespective of the nature of wellbeing—be it values, informed-preferences, happiness or an objective list of goods—personal wellbeing values have some significance. An important commitment that is largely shared among philosophical theories of wellbeing—even among some objective list views (Fletcher 2013, see also chapter 7)—is that wellbeing in some way depends on the individual valuational makeup. Because different people have different values and desires, different aspects of life matter in different ways to people. This even applies to hedonistic theories: Even if happiness is ultimately the only good contributing to wellbeing, different aspects in life will affect happiness in different ways depending on their personal make-up. Beside unequivocal importance attached to wellbeing values in contemporary theories of wellbeing, and in particular the variety of views on wellbeing, we believe they are important for two pragmatic reasons.

1. Firstly, while the study of wellbeing has gained a lot of popularity in the social sciences, their application to policy is still largely controversial. One important reason for this is the threat of paternalism when value-laden measures of wellbeing are used to guide policy. Robert Sugden (2006, 2008) has even argued that regardless of how wellbeing constructs are developed, if they are used to guide policy, they will necessarily run into the risk of

[6] Although some notable exceptions are Boulanger et al., (2011), Van Ootegem and Spillemaeckers (2010), Carr (2013), Tafaodi et al. (2012) and Bonn and Tafarodi (2013), and in the context of poverty: Narayan, Chambers, Shah and Petersch (2000), and Giacaman et al. (2007) in the occupied territories of Palestine.

threatening the freedom and wellbeing of those who deviate from the view of the good life a measure represents. In a recent article Daniel Haybron and Valerie Tiberius (2015) defend a view called pragmatic subjectivism which holds that regardless the policy maker's view on wellbeing, there are good reasons to base wellbeing policy on personal wellbeing values. The charge of paternalism seems much less applicable in case wellbeing policy is based on people's own views of what makes life good for them.

2. Secondly, we believe that learning about personal wellbeing values has important implications for the valuation of wellbeing measures. In case people's wellbeing values are roughly similar within the population studied, it seems acceptable to measure wellbeing by means of an objectively valued uniform wellbeing index, even on subjective conceptions of wellbeing—such as is often pragmatically done in empirical studies using the capability approach. However, if evidence is found that personal wellbeing values vary widely, using objectively valued indices would be contentious on accounts of wellbeing that are (in part) subjective.

An important assumption in this chapter is that people are reasonably good sources of their own values in the following sense. When confronted with a set of values that could plausibly constitute their wellbeing, they are able to ordinally rank them.

For our empirical investigation, we used Q methodology (Watts and Stenner 2012), a scientific method for the study of subjective views that enables us to identify communalities and differences in viewpoints among individuals on what constitutes wellbeing. Q methodology has been used before to study a variety of subjective phenomena such as European identity (Robyn 2004), attitudes towards policy proposals (e.g. Ellis, Barry, and Robinson 2007) and public views on principles for health care priority setting (van Exel et al. 2015), just to name a few. Q methodology has also been suggested as an appropriate investigation tool in the context of deliberative democracy (Dryzek 1990; Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008), fitting particularly well with the democratic commitments within the capability approach. Furthermore, Brown (2006) has advocated the importance of Q methodology in political spheres for its ability to help identify not only the population's opinions at large, but also the marginalized opinions. For similar reasons, Wolf (2013) has

suggested that Q methodology would be an excellent source of information to inform choices in quality of life measurement. The method has already been used to study conceptions of quality of life in the context of health (Stenner, Cooper, and Skevington 2003), as part of a study exploring democratically legitimate indicators of wellbeing for Belgium (Boulanger et al. 2011), and in a study on wellbeing conceptions in Australia (Carr 2013). The current study is unique in using Q methodology to study the variety of conceptions of the good life in a large sample of citizens.

2. Methods and Data

We used 36 statements representing potential constituents of a good life. In order to arrive at this set of statements, we constructed a taxonomy of different theories and lists of multidimensional wellbeing (see table 2.1). A number of lists were selected originating from different literatures, namely: the capability approach (Robeyns and van der Veen 2007; Nussbaum 2000; Qizilbash 1998), policy research of governmental organizations (Durand 2015; Fitoussi, Sen, and Stiglitz 2009), and general social indicator studies (Narayan et al. 2000; Ranis, Stewart, and Ramirez 2000; Cummins 1996). An important source in this process was Alkire's (2002) work on multidimensional wellbeing lists that indicates that the convergence of all these lists proposed in the literature is remarkable. Here, we selected 11 dimensions of wellbeing that roughly cover the aforementioned lists.[7]

The identification of these domains was based on a judgment of how the different lists would fit most parsimoniously within the chosen domains.[8] Based on these 11 dimensions, a set of 36 statements was developed that we judged to be representative of the range of topics

[7] As one referee pointed out to us, it may seem surprising that SWB itself is not part of this list. This is not because we believe SWB, or happiness, is not an important feature of life, but because it is a concept of a higher level of abstraction than our dimensions. We believed that all dimensions and statements should be of roughly the same level of abstraction, and should be unambiguously interpretable. SWB is compatible with our framework in two possible ways. SWB is means subjective evaluation of life – which is compatible with the view that it is an evaluation of roughly these dimensions – or as an experience – in which case it can either be seen as pleasure – which is captured with the dimension of mental well-being.

[8] The final taxonomy excludes two categories from the analyzed lists, both of which were only included in one list (care and equality). The exclusion of these two categories is defensible on the grounds that they are neither an essential part of individual well-being: inequality being a feature of society, while care seems to be a causal influence rather than a constituent of well-being.

covered by the 11 dimensions, phrased at a comparable level of generality.

Table 2.1: Taxonomy of different lists categorized into 11 domains

No		Domain	Theories								Statements
			Capability approach			Human development and social indicator research					
			Robeyns and van der Veen (2007)	Nussbaum (2000)	Qizilbash (1998)	Stiglitz et al. (2009)	OECD (2013)	Narayan et al. (2000)	Cummins (1996)	Ranis et al. (2006)	
1		Physical health	Physical health	Bodily health	Nutrition, health, sanitation, rest	Health	Physical health	Bodily health	Health	Bodily wellbeing	16. Having a healthy lifestyle 18. The prospect of many healthy years ahead 25. Feeling physically well 36. Being physically able to do my daily activities
2		Safety	Security	Bodily integrity	Security	Personal insecurity	Secure environment	Security	Safety	Political security (1)	4. Being in a stable environment with little risk of dramatic events in my personal life 22. Being in an environment where opinions can be freely expressed 24. Being in an environment with little risk of natural disaster or social unrest 28. Being free to go where I want to be 34. Being in an environment where everyone's values are respected
3		Recreation and leisure	Recreation	Play	Enjoyment (1)	Personal activities	Work-life balance			Leisure conditions	21. Going on vacation 32. Spending time on leisure
4		Mental wellbeing	Mental health	Emotions / senses, imagination and thought (1: intrinsic)	Enjoyment (2)		Mental health and subjective wellbeing	Psychological wellbeing	Emotional wellbeing	Mental wellbeing	13. Feeling mentally well 17. Absence of stress and anxiety

No		Domain	Theories								Statements
			Capability approach			Human development and social indicator research					
			Robeyns and van der Veen (2007)	**Nussbaum (2000)**	**Qizilbash (1998)**	**Stiglitz et al. (2009)**	**OECD (2013)**	**Narayan et al. (2000)**	**Cummins (1996)**	**Ranis et al. (2006)**	
5		Political representation	Political influence and participation and freedom from non-discrimination	Control over one's environment (political)	Liberty (negative freedom)	Political voice and governance	Civic engagement and good governance			Political freedom / political security (2)	7. Feeling represented in political decision making that affects my daily life 11. Voting in elections 27. Being part of political decision ma that affects my daily life
6		Mental development	Knowledge and intellectual development	Practical reason/ senses, imagination and thought (2: instrumental)	Basic intellectual and physical capacities and literacy / autonomy and self-determination / understanding	Education (1: instrumental)	Education (1: instrumental)	Freedom of choice and action		Empowerment / mental development	5. Being up to date with respect to the things that I find important 15. Being able to form an opinion about the things that I find important. 19. Living a spiritual life 33. Being able to make my own choices in life 35. Being educated in a way that suits me
7		Environmental conditions	Shelter/ mobility/ living-environment	Control over one's environment (material), other species	Shelter	Environmental conditions / economic insecurity	Housing / quality of the natural environment			Environmental conditions	6. Feeling at home in the environment where I live 8. Living in an environment with sufficient open and natural spaces 12. Living in an environment with facilities that are important to me (e.g. libraries, cinemas, nightlife, museums) 30. Feeling at ease in the house where I live in

No		Domain	Theories								Statements
			Capability approach			Human development and social indicator research					
			Robeyns and van der Veen (2007)	Nussbaum (2000)	Qizilbash (1998)	Stiglitz et al. (2009)	OECD (2013)	Narayan et al. (2000)	Cummins (1996)	Ranis et al. (2006)	
8		Social relations	Social relations	Affiliation	Significant relations with others and some participation is social life	Social connections	Social connections	Social wellbeing	Intimacy and friendship / community	Social relations / community wellbeing	10. Having friends and meeting them regularly 14. Being part of a community or group in which members support one another 23. Having a nice romantic relationship 26. Having a good relationship with my family 31. Being appreciated by my social environment
9		Material wellbeing		Control over one's environment (material)			Income and wealth	Material wellbeing	Material wellbeing	Economic security	1. Being able to meet my material needs 3. Having a good income relative to my social environment
10		Labor conditions	Labor				Availability and quality of jobs			Work conditions	9. Having a meaningful daily activity (work or other)
11		Achievements			Self-respect and aspiration / achievements	Education (2: in terms of achievement)	Education (2: in terms of achievement)		Productivity		2. Living according to my own values 20. Having accomplished something—or accomplishing something—I am proud of 29. Contributing to society.
	Omitted		Care							Inequalities	

Note: The bracketed numbers indicate that a specific category of one of the lists fitted in more than one domain. Statements were randomly assigned a number.

Respondents and Procedure

Respondents were recruited from an existing, renowned panel (http://www.centerdata.nl/en/about-centerdata). A sample of the people who had previously signed up for this panel, aimed to be roughly representative of the adult general population in the Netherlands in terms of age, gender and level of education, received an invitation to participate in our study. This invitation contained brief information about the purpose of our study and the content of the questionnaire. By accepting the invitation to participate in this particular study, they provided consent for the use of the information they provided for the purposes of our study. Respondents received no incentive and were free to terminate their participation in the study at any point in the questionnaire. The data from respondents who stopped before the end of the statement sorting task were disregarded. The questionnaire was pilot-tested in a sample of 100 respondents, who generally found the questionnaire to be feasible, comprehensible and interesting.

Respondents completed the questionnaire online. They were consecutively asked to:

1. read all the statements, which were presented to them in random order;
2. in the process of reading to place each statement into one of three piles, labelled as unimportant, neutral or important for “a good life for you”;
3. by pile, in the order important-unimportant-neutral, locate all statements onto the sorting grid according to their relative importance for “a good life for you”;
4. after finishing, to clarify their ranking in writing by providing an explanation for the (un)importance of the four statements placed in the far left and right columns of the sorting grid for their view on as good life as well as by providing a short description of their view in an open text field;
5. and respond to a number of questions about various aspects of their life, including basic demographic characteristics.

For the purpose of our research interest, we wanted people to reflect on the life that they believed to be good in terms of wellbeing. We believed it was more natural for people to do this when they were asked to reflect on what constitutes a good life for them, rather than to ask them about

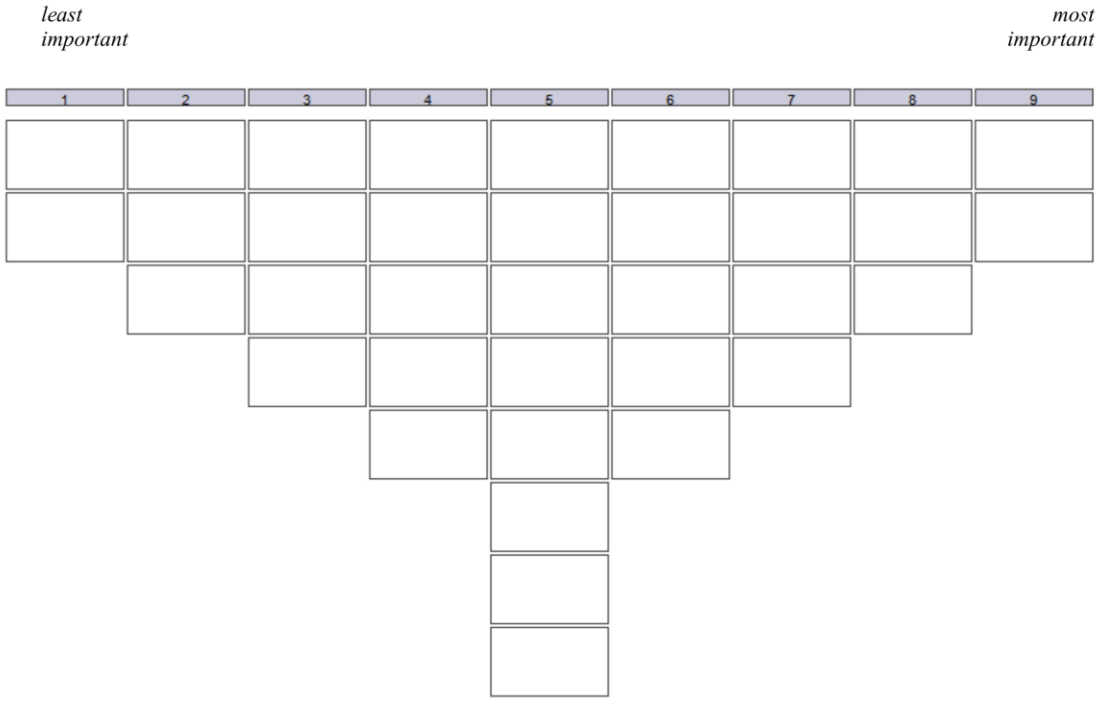
what they held to be personal wellbeing values directly (see also Haybron and Tiberius 2015). We hence asked respondents to rank the statements in relation to how strongly they related to "a good life for you" (Haybron and Tiberius 2015). For the purpose of brevity and readability, in the following we will use "a good life" and "wellbeing" interchangeably, without an intended shift in meaning. In total our sample included 1,529 respondents from the adult population of the Netherlands, 82 (5.4%) of which were initially excluded for either taking fewer than 4 minutes to finish the Q sort (i.e. speeding) or failing to complete the statement ranking task. The average age of respondents was 55 (range 16-92) and 56% were women, meaning that the sample was not fully representative of the Dutch population in terms of age and gender (but was roughly so in terms of level of education).

Data

For the analysis and treatment of the data, the pensieve package for Q methodology was used in R. After the sorting, statements placed in each column were given a rank score: Here, -4 for the column on the left up to +4 for the column on the right of the sorting grid (see figure 2.1).[9]

[9] Please note that respondents saw 1 to 9 as the column numbers in order to take away the connotation of their ranking of the statements in a forced grid with positive, neutral, or negative scores.

Figure 2.1: Sorting grid used for the ranking of statements



Missing Values

To minimize the data loss that would result from excluding all such participants that did not complete their ranking from the analysis, a *pairwise complete observations* method was applied, resulting in a final exclusion of 26 participants (1.7%), thus leaving 1,503 participants for analysis.

Factor Extraction

The essence of Q methodology is the usage of a by-person factor extraction to achieve a number of factors that are summaries of variation between different individuals and represent a significant proportion of variation within the dataset. Factor scores are computed for each of the 36 statements, which are translated back into a full ranking of the statements and, together with the qualitative data, are interpreted as viewpoints. A viewpoint thus takes the form of a particular way a person that correlates 100% with the factor would have ordered the set of statements.

For factor extraction we used principal components analysis. In order to determine the number of factors to be extracted from the data,

we apply the Kaiser-Guttman cutoff of Eigenvalues greater than one (Kaiser 1960; Guttman 1954), with values adjusted by a parallel analysis (Horn 1965). Parallel analysis corrects for the fact that Eigenvalues greater than one may be due to random variation in large datasets. Due to the size of the dataset at hand, we believe this is the best available method for determining the factor retention.

The parallel analysis suggests that 4-5 factors may be retained, depending on the correlation coefficient used (Pearson's r is more generous). Because the choice of correlation coefficient is somewhat arbitrary and conservative we stick to the more generous 5 factor solution in the below. The factor extraction of five factors yields an explained variance of 47.6%.

Factor Rotation

Because the *unrotated loadings* and the resulting factor *scores* are hard to interpret (Thompson 2004, 39), especially in the context of Q Methodology (Brown 1980, p33ff), we applied quartimax rotation.[10]

Factor Scores

The factor scores reproduced here are simple loadings-weighted averages of the raw statement rankings provided by participants, a simple procedure otherwise known as regression scores. For each factor, statements were placed in the sorting grid (see figure 2.1) based on their factor scores, from lowest score into the outmost left column (-4) to the highest score in the outmost right column (+4) (see table 2.3). In the description of the factors in the results section, we will make reference to this placement of statements as follows: (st.17, +4), meaning that statement 17 had a rank score +4 in that factor.

[10] The criteria used for the selection of the rotation method were the following: 1) Authenticity: Every factor should include, as far as possible, many high loaders who load only on that factor. It seems quite unattractive to interpret a factor score which, in this form, has not been produced by (at least some) participants. 2) Well-Defined Scores: Factor scores should, as far as possible, produce a definitive ranking of items, shared by many people. This implies that factor scores should have little spread (a low, loadings-weighted standard deviation of raw scores). 3) Specificity: Factor scores should not, as far as possible, be highly correlated with other factor scores. Q Methodology seeks to highlight differences in viewpoints, and, if empirically observable, the rotation procedure should highlight such differences for interpretation. We did not use two other criteria sometimes mentioned in the literature, namely an equal contribution of factors to the overall explained variance, as well as the absence of bipolar factors. While both of those are inconveniences – especially bipolar factors – we consider them to be essential empirical findings, not artefacts of the rotation procedure.

In addition, we will use some of the explanations given by respondents who loaded highly on that view ('exemplars') for illustration purposes. As much as possible we use literal translations from the original Dutch explanations, but some were slightly edited for legibility. One of the questions used asked the respondents to briefly describe their view on wellbeing in their own words. Beside looking at the answers to these answers of the exemplars of the viewpoints for their interpretation, we also did a more systematic analysis of the words used to describe the good life in order to compare the usage of words that related to particular viewpoints between exemplars of these viewpoints and the rest of the sample. We selected the words on conceptual grounds, and used a statistical program in STATA to count their frequency.

3. Results

General results

As a first impression of the data, table 2.2 presents average rank scores of the highest and lowest ranking statements for the full respondent sample (n=1,503). Striking is the consensus among respondents about the importance of health in their conceptions of a good life (shown by the high average rank scores of statements 13, 18, 25 and 36) and the apparent unimportance of political participation (statements 7 and 27) and spirituality (statement 19). For example, only 2.4% of the respondents ranked feeling represented in political decision making higher than +1, and being part of political decision making was only ranked that highly by 1.5% of the respondents. Common reasons provided by respondents for their very low ranking of political participation statements were cynicism about politicians' motivations ("there is no point, they do whatever they want to anyway" id. 15), perceived lack of effect of participation in our political system ("the amount of influence you can have as an individual is so minimal I won't waste my energy with that" id. 848) and general lack of interest ("It is generally important, but unfortunately I don't care" id. 713). With respect to spirituality, 46% of respondents ranked it as being the least important for a good life, and only 8% ranked it higher than +1. The general attitude reflected by those is that spirituality is either too vague ("spirituality is too woozy for me" (id.1)), or related to religion, which in turn is not appreciated ("…too much suffering due to religious faith", id.193).

Table 2.2: highest and lowest ranking statements in the overall sample

St.		Mean	Std. dev.
	Highest averages		
13	**Feeling mentally well**	1.57	1.71
18	**The prospect of many healthy years ahead**	1.38	2.05
25	**Feeling physically well**	1.31	1.64
	Feeling at home in the environment where I live	1.26	1.74
36	**Being physically able to do my daily activities**	1.08	1.74
6	**Feeling at ease in the house where I live in**	1.08	1.59
2	**Living according to my own values**	1.03	2.00
	Lowest averages		
7	**Feeling represented in political decision making that affects my daily life**	-2.25	1.55
19	**Living a spiritual life**	-2.39	2.14
27	**Being part of political decision making that affects my daily life**	-2.53	1.44

The first of the five viewpoints is a wide-ranging factor; 1,067 people loaded significantly onto this viewpoint, of which 1,037 loaded positively. The four other viewpoints that were identified had more evenly divided loadings among the respondents.[11]

[11] Overall, there were far more *positive* than *negative* correlations between the rankings of statements by participants, which means that most people appear *not* to sort the items in a diametrically opposed fashion. In other words, participants seem to think *differently* about conceptions of the good life, rather than in *inverse* ways. As a result of this, in the following we will discuss these viewpoints from the perspective of the positive loaders, as we cannot expect the negative loaders to represent the inverse viewpoint.

Table 2.3: The five viewpoints

Dimen-sion	No.	Statement	Health and feeling well	Hearth and home	Freedom and Auton-omy	Social relations and purpose	Individual-ism and Independ-ence
Health	16	Having a healthy lifestyle	1	1	-2	0	-2
	18	The prospect of many healthy years ahead	4	1	-3	0	-1
	25	Feeling physically well	3	0	0	1	-1
	36	Being physically able to do my daily activities	3	-3	0	0	0
Safety	4	Being in a stable environment with little risk of dramatic events in my personal life	-1	0	-1	-4	-4
	24	Being in an environment with little risk of natural disaster or social unrest	0	3	-3	-4	-3
	22	Being in an environment where opinions can be freely expressed	0	0	2	-2	0
	28	Being free to go where I want to be	2	-1	3	-3	1
	34	Being in an environment where everyone's values are respected	0	-1	4	0	-1
Recreat-ion and Leisure	21	Going on vacation	-1	-1	-4	1	4
	32	Spending time on leisure	0	-4	0	1	1
Mental Wellbeing	13	Feeling mentally well	4	2	1	1	-1
	17	Absence of stress and anxiety	1	2	-1	0	-3
Political represent-ation	7	Feeling represented in political decision making that affects my daily life	-3	-2	-1	-1	0
	11	Voting in elections	-2	-1	0	-2	0
	27	Being part of political decision making that affects my daily life	-4	-3	-2	0	0

Dimen-sion	No.	Statement	Health and feeling well	Hearth and home	Freedom and Auton-omy	Social relations and purpose	Individual-ism and Independ-ence
Mental developm ent	5	Being knowledgeable with respect to the things that I find important	-1	1	0	-1	1
	15	Being able to form an opinion about the things that I find important.	0	1	3	-1	2
	19	Living a spiritual life	-4	-4	-1	2	-3
	33	Being able to make my own choices in life	2	-3	4	-2	4
	35	Being educated in a way that suits me	-2	-2	0	1	2
Environm ental condition s	6	Feeling at home in the environment where I live	3	4	1	0	-1
	8	Living in an environment with sufficient open and natural spaces	0	3	-1	-1	-2
	12	Living in an environment with facilities that are important to me (e.g. libraries, cinemas, nightlife, museums)	-3	0	-2	0	1
	30	Feeling at ease in the house where I live in	2	0	1	-1	0
Social relations	10	Having friends and meeting them regularly	1	2	2	4	0
	14	Being part of a community or group in which members support one another	-2	0	1	3	-4
	23	Having a nice romantic relationship	0	-2	-3	4	2
	26	Having a good relationship with my family	1	0	1	2	-2
	31	Being appreciated by my social environment	-1	-2	0	2	1
Material wellbeing	1	Being able to meet my material needs	0	4	-2	-3	3

Dimen-sion	No.	Statement	Health and feeling well	Hearth and home	Freedom and Auton-omy	Social relations and purpose	Individual-ism and Independ-ence
	3	Having a good income relative to my social environment	-3	1	-4	-2	3
Achievement	9	Having a meaningful daily activity (work or other)	1	2	2	3	0
	2	Living according to my own values	2	3	3	-3	3
	20	Having accomplished something—or accomplishing something—I am proud of	-1	0	0	3	2
	29	Contributing something to society	-2	-1	2	2	-2

Viewpoint 1: Feeling well and being healthy

This wide-ranging viewpoint captures a relatively large share of the variance in the Q sorts, and as such presents a wide consensus view on how people perceive of their wellbeing. Central in this view point is the importance of health features and feeling well. Feeling well (st.13, +4) is centrally important and is motivated by its intrinsic value, but also for enabling the value of all the other important things. One exemplar explained: "If you are not feeling well, it feels as if all the other aspects in life are not worth it. You will not be able to enjoy anything" (id. 595). In terms of health, both longevity (st.18, +4), feeling healthy (st.25, +3), as well as physical ability (st.36, +3) are considered important. Similarly, many cite the intrinsic value of health as one of the main reasons for why they consider it so important: "Health is the most important thing there is!" (id. 228). At the same time, a respondent wrote "I want to stay independent of others" as a motivation, which resonated among a number of other respondents as well. Lastly, homeliness is also an important aspect of wellbeing for this viewpoint (st.6, +3; st.30, +2). One respondent explained: "Because this is your basis. If you do not feel comfortable here, how can you feel comfortable anywhere?" (id. 44).

Like in the overall sample (see table 2.3), statements about political participation (st.27, -4; st.7, -3 & st.11, -2) and spirituality (st.19, -4) rank

very low. Similarly, relative income compared to others (st.3, -3), as well as having cultural facilities close by (st.12, -3) were considered among the least important statements to wellbeing in this view. About the latter, respondents generally wrote that "If this is a little further away, I can always travel to get there" (id. 1,483). About relative income, a typical participant eloquently wrote: "a rich man is not happier than someone who knows he has enough" (id.29).

Overall, it are down-to-earth immaterial personal things that matter to wellbeing in this general view point, much more than material and public goods.

Viewpoint 2: Hearth and home

Viewpoint 2 is a homely view. Those who load highly onto this viewpoint value feeling at home, and value open spaces and safety in the environment where they live (st.6, +4, st.8, +3, st.24, +3). One exemplar explained that "This brings peace and solidarity. I like greeting people and having acquaintances in the neighbourhood" (id. 955). Furthermore, exemplars value being able to meet their material needs (st.1, +4), and living according to their own values (st.2, +3). To some, living according to their own values was closely tied to the Dutch culture: "I feel very Dutch. I lived in South America for 13 years, so I know there are differences." (id. 1,161) But, for both living according to your own values as well as meeting material needs, many reasons are given that relate to wanting to be independent of others for their needs: "being dependent on others for elementary things seems terrible to me" an exemplar explained in relation to material needs (id. 1,355). Furthermore, having friends (st.10, +2), having a meaningful daily activity (st.9, +2), and feeling mentally well (st.13, +2) were also considered important.

Overall, the view represents a homely take on wellbeing that is characterized by a regard for one's living place, quality of one's social and physical environment, and being able to take care of their own needs. One exemplar put it as follows: wellbeing is: "living in a nice and safe environment, among people you know and trust, where helping each other if necessary is the norm." (id.1265).

Viewpoint 3: Freedom and autonomy

The third viewpoint emphasizes statements that are all strongly related to individual freedom and personal autonomy. It is particularly making one's own choices (st.33, +4), respect for everyone's values (st.34, +4),

being able and free to form opinions (st.15, +3; st.22, +2), living according to your own values (st.2, +3), and being free to go wherever you want to go (st.28, +3) that are valued in this viewpoint. These statements all fit very closely together in their relationship to personal freedom and autonomy. The respect for everyone's values was explained by one exemplar as follows: "Not everyone needs to have the same values and norms, if we just accept this and do not try to impose anything on each other" (id. 474). One exemplar put the relationship between autonomy and living well quite strongly: "This is, to me, the essence of life: taking responsibility for my own choices, and being mentally able to make these choices" (id. 1,452).

The key of this view is captured well by one exemplar who wrote: "Living in freedom, surrounded by people who respect each other" (id. 234). Or similarly: "Living in freedom in a country that has freedom of speech, but where people nevertheless respect one another" (id. 295).

Viewpoint 4: Social relationships and purpose

Social relationships and having a sense of purpose are essential to this viewpoint. Friendships (st.10, +4), romantic relationships (st.23, +4), as well as the community (st.14, +3) are highly valued. Family relations (st.26, +2) and being appreciated by the social environment (st.31, +2) also rank highly. One exemplar explained that: "a good life means at least that you are surrounded by people with whom you can share life, for better or worse, and whom you can trust" (id. 1,174). Or, in relationship to friends, one exemplar explained her choice of ranking friendships so highly: "For me this social aspect is simply the most important part of a good life" (id. 1,325). Accomplishment (st.20, +3), a meaningful daily activity (st.9, +3), and contributing something to society (st.29, +2) all matter to this viewpoint. The exemplars explain that having a sense of purpose is important to them: "I need a purpose in my life to strive for" (id. 937), or I "want to be useful" (id. 943).

Overall, other people and one's relationship to them is crucial to this view. This is summed well by one of its exemplars: "For me a good life is giving and receiving love, participating in society, space for relaxation, doing things that you find fulfilling and enjoyable." (id. 995).

Viewpoint 5: Individualism and Independence

This viewpoint values being independent of others: being able to make your own choices in life and living according to your own values are both

valued highly (st.33, +4, st.2, +3). An exemplar explained: “I want to do things my way. Make my own choices, go my own way, and arrange my life according to my own needs.” (id.344). Different from the other views, and in particular the Freedom and Autonomy view, this viewpoint is also characterized by materialism, not only as a means to meet material needs (st.1, +3), but also to be better off than others (st.3, +3), and going on vacation (st.21, +4). One exemplar explained that he wanted “to work hard, and be compensated by material goods (money), so I can fulfil my desires in life.” (id. 1,065). Another simply explained that it was valued because he wanted “to be free” (id. 60). One exemplar saw wellbeing in terms of “being healthy, having many friends, and making lots of money” (id. 855). This viewpoint also represents a high regard for accomplishment (st.20, +2).

Besides the high regard for personal income and vacations, another difference with the Freedom and Autonomy view is the importance attached to romantic relationships (s.23, +2). The individualism of this view is also visible in what is considered unimportant. Community and contributing to society were considered among the least important in this view (st.14, -4, st.29, -2).

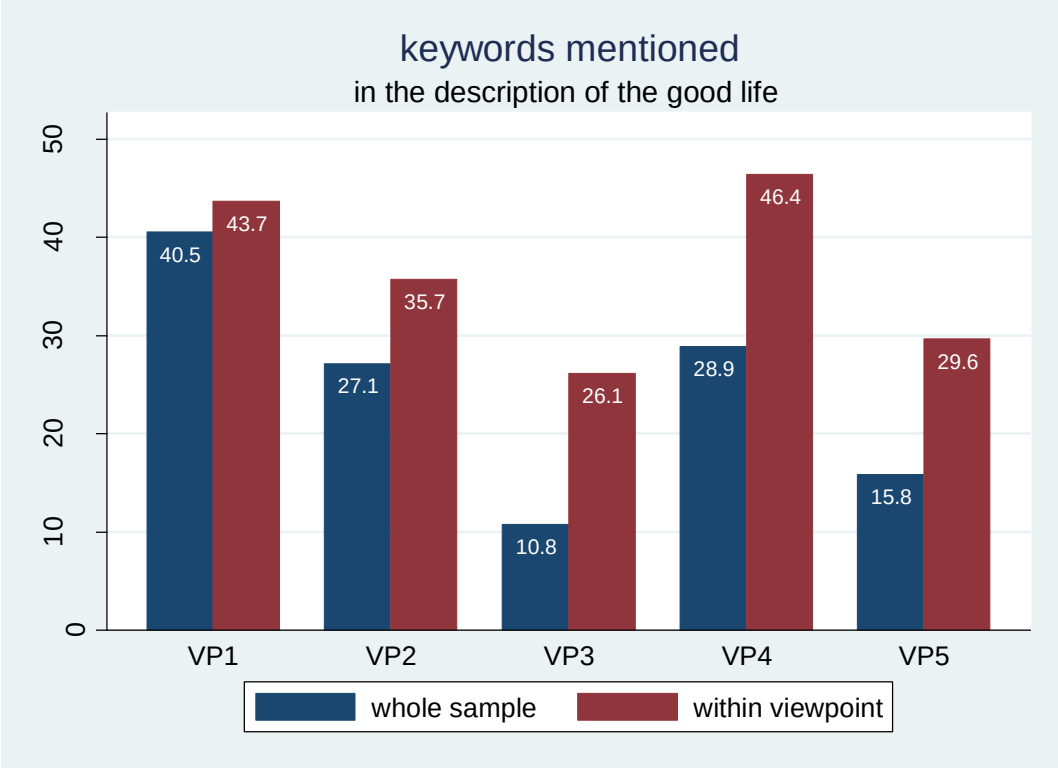
Overall, the viewpoint describes a perspective on wellbeing in which being able to strive for individual goals is most important, both materially as well as in terms of not being restricted by others.

Qualitative data

While many respondents—even those who score high on viewpoints 2-5—summarize their view on wellbeing in terms of more generic statements about health, family, and happiness, it is remarkable that there are substantial differences among exemplars in the way they summarize wellbeing in a sentence (see figure 2.2). This difference is most striking in case of the *Freedom and Autonomy* view, in which case exemplars are 2.4 times more likely for someone to use the words “free”, “freedom”, “choose”, or “responsibility” in their answers compared to the sample average. In case of *Social Relationships and Purpose* exemplars were 1.6 times more likely to use a number of words that are related to others in their view on wellbeing. The difference for the first viewpoint, *Feeling Well and Being Healthy,* is much less pronounced. The reason for this is that over a third of the sample loads positively onto this viewpoint, and it constitutes a large share of the explained variance.

While this rough summary of the qualitative results cannot do full justice to all the explanations we received from the respondents, it shows that qualitative and quantitative results do align, as the variation in the rankings of statements summarized in the factor arrays corresponds to what participants loading on those factors explained in their own words.

figure 2.2: keywords mentioned in the qualitative descriptions



The keywords used are the following*:
VP1: “health”, “happiness”
VP2: “house”, “home”, “family” (nuclear, dutch: “gezin”), “environment”, “location”, “harmony”, “nature”
VP3: “free”, “freedom”, “choose”, “responsibility”
VP4: “people”, “other(s)”, “social”, “friends”, the dutch:“gezellig” (difficult to translate, coming close to friendly (cozy) atmosphere)
VP5: “independent”, “own”, “self”

Demographics and viewpoints

There are some notable demographic differences between exemplars of different viewpoints (table 2.4). The exemplars of the first viewpoint are very similar, in terms of demographics, compared to the whole sample—which is to be expected given the large number of exemplars. However, in particular the exemplars of the *Individualism and Independence* view are significantly richer ($p<.01$), higher educated ($p<.01$), and younger

($p<.01$) than the rest of the sample. Given this view is the only view that values relative income, these results show that such a valuation is not merely aspirational. The exemplars of the *Hearth and Home* view on other hand are significantly more likely to be female ($p<.05$) and older ($p<.01$), and the exemplars of the *Social Relationships and Purpose* view and the *Freedom and Autonomy* view are more likely to be college educated ($p<.05$, $p<.01$, respectively).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

We observed five viewpoints on wellbeing among the general public in the Netherlands. Most importantly, we find strong evidence for plurality within these views. A large amount of common variance is caught by the first factor, which captures a central and simple idea about wellbeing: health and happiness are central to how people perceive their wellbeing. Furthermore, we saw that there are four viewpoints which in different degrees helps to explain people's views on wellbeing. These five views together are able to explain 47.6% of the variance. This means that 52.4% of the variance is left unexplained by these viewpoints and is due to individual idiosyncrasies. While there appears to be much agreement on the importance of health and feeling well, of which the endorsement of the first viewpoint is indicative, there is also much difference in how people perceive wellbeing, of which the latter four viewpoints are indicative. Even though a clear common picture arises, we must also conclude that to a large extent, concrete perceptions of wellbeing remain in the eye of the beholder; but such perceptions are likely to be made up of a mix of these five views, with the first view being most prominent. A number of these findings deserve further discussion.

We find a large consensus with respect to the features that were *not* found to be considered very important to a good life: political participation and representation. This is closely in line with some other empirical work on wellbeing conceptions in developed countries (e.g. Van Ootegem and Spillemaeckers 2010). There are three possible interpretations of this finding. Firstly, it could be that people have such bad connotations with politics that they rank it low even though on further reflection they would contend that it is quite an important part of their wellbeing. While this could be an explanation, from the written comments we know that there are at least some participants who say that it is important, but simply not so important for their wellbeing. A second interpretation is that political participation does not matter greatly for

wellbeing. Political governance is surely a major causal factor in creating freedom and opportunities within a country, and, especially when it goes awry, a major part of concern, but perhaps not in itself something intrinsically part of wellbeing in people's conceptions of the concept. Quite interestingly, one of the empirical quality of life studies cited above (Giacaman et al. 2007) found that in the Palestine territories, political representation was seen as one of the wellbeing values. In this vein, a last possible interpretation we can give to our finding is that political representation is a very important part of people's conceptions of wellbeing, but something that people stop appreciating as soon as it is achieved sufficiently. In other words, people adapt to political representation. Regardless of the correct interpretation, the finding seems significant in itself, and deserves further study.

Both the happiness approach and the capability approach are motivated from dissatisfaction with material measures of wellbeing. We find that material wellbeing does not seem to play a very central role generally. Only in one particular view, that we have called *Individualism and Independence*, material goods seem to play a central role. The lack of importance attached to material goods in general can be taken as an indication that material measures of wellbeing overemphasize the material aspects of wellbeing. On the other hand, defenders of material measures may cite the instrumental value that income and wealth have. In this vein, some of the written comments indicate that it is not necessarily the status of being rich, or having sufficient income itself that is valued, but rather the independence and dignity this provides alongside the enjoyable opportunities that come with it (such as vacations). It could be suggested that material measures are a good proxy of wellbeing in virtue of this feature. Nevertheless, the low appreciation in most of the views we found justifies questioning this framework in western societies. The responses show the importance of the distinction stressed by Sen, between "being well off" and "being well" (1985). In analogy to political participation and representation, thresholds and adaptation may play a role and in countries in which the level of material wealth is lower than in the Netherlands, and perhaps a matter of daily concern, material aspects may be valued higher.

Looking on the more positive side—at what *does* matter to wellbeing in people's perceptions—a general interpretation of the results is that particularly feeling well and being healthy are particularly central to people's conceptions of their wellbeing. This is captured by our central

viewpoint. Nevertheless, on the importance of a large number of other central aspects, such as freedom, mental wellbeing, social relationships, and independence, our respondents were much more divided. Furthermore, even with the disagreements on the importance of these aspects aside, a large unexplained variance remained.

We believe our findings have some significant implications for formulating conceptualizations and developing measures of wellbeing. For the capability approach, the heterogeneity of wellbeing values challenges the idea that there is consensus about a list of goods that constitute wellbeing, as certain aspects matter much more to some than to others. In considering the validity of SWB measures of wellbeing, individuals value a variety of goods beside mental wellbeing, implying that purely affective measures may not capture all that people subjectively value. Finally, thresholds and adaptation may play a role for some goods, like income, political participation and spirituality, meaning that people only value them as important for their wellbeing when, in a certain context or period of time, a subsistence or aspiration level for those goods is not met. Further study is necessary regarding how to deal with this heterogeneity in wellbeing research.

Chapter 3: *Which* Problem of Adaptation?[12]

1. Introduction

Regardless of which theory of wellbeing one believes to be correct, most people will agree that happiness is one of the most central aspects of human wellbeing. A recent strand of economic literature has utilized this observation: rather than measuring human wellbeing by means of economic prosperity, economists have started to explore the feasibility of measuring happiness or satisfaction with one's life. An important idea behind this is that economic prosperity cannot be seen as having intrinsic value to people by itself: after all, what is the point of economic prosperity, if it does not make us happier, or more generally, better off? The measurement of people's perception of their happiness or satisfaction with life in the social sciences has come to be known as the measurement of subjective wellbeing (SWB). The study of SWB has seen a flourishing decade in economics and has formed its own subfield called happiness economics. Nevertheless, not everyone is equally enthusiastic about this new current in economics. Paper titles such as "Against happiness" (Stewart 2014) and "happiness is not wellbeing" (Raibley 2012) demonstrate that some believe there is a darker side to the seemingly cheerful attempt to re-incorporate happiness into the discipline of economics (see for instance Annas 2004; Barrotta 2008; Sen 2008; Adler and Posner 2008; Deneulin and Shahani 2009; Hausman 2010; Nussbaum 2012; Fleurbaey and Blanchet 2013). What is most controversial about SWB is not that happiness, or satisfaction with life, is something good generally. The controversy lies in the widely regarded assumption that SWB—a psychological state concept—is a measure of wellbeing simpliciter—a concept describing how good life is for the person living it (See for example Angner 2008, 2010 for discussions). It is this underlying assumption that has attracted quite some critical attention from philosophers and economists alike. While many

[12] This chapter was originally published as Van der Deijl, Willem J.A. (2017). "Which Problem of Adaptation?" *Utilitas,* 1-19. doi:10.1017/S095382081600043. Some modifications to the published article have been made.

researchers working with SWB express a more nuanced view in which SWB is only taken to be part of a multi-dimensional wellbeing concept, in this chapter I focus on the popular view among happiness researchers that SWB is a measure of human wellbeing (WB) in general. For brevity, I will refer to the view as the SWB-WB view.

This chapter focuses on one particular widely discussed objection to the SWB-WB view: the adaptation problem (Sen 1985a, 1985b, 1987, 1999, 2008, 2009, Nussbaum 2000, 2003, 2011, 2012). Adaptation occurs when a change in happiness (or satisfaction) due to external circumstances is mitigated, not due to a restoration of the external circumstances, but due to an internal change in aspiration, expectations or desires. Adaptation is most commonly discussed in the context of bad circumstances: the phenomenon that desires, aspirations or ambitions are restricted due to limiting circumstances such as prolonged deprivation. When this occurs, an individual may still think of themselves as happy or satisfied, despite their seemingly bad position. This phenomenon is discussed as a problem in a variety of contexts, such as the fair distribution of resources.[13] However, in this chapter, I will only be concerned with the problem the phenomenon poses for the SWB-WB view.

That the phenomenon of adaptation poses a problem to the SWB-WB view is widely acknowledged; however, it is less clear why adaptation is a problem. While there are some exceptions (e.g. Chekola 2007; Taylor 2014), no systematic attempt has been made to clearly define the different adaptation problems, or identify the different consequences for the empirical literature on happiness. One perspective about the phenomenon of adaptation is that it poses a problem to the SWB-WB view because it illustrates that happy people may not be leading good lives, and consequently, happiness is not sufficient for wellbeing. Because this pertains to the nature of wellbeing, we can call this view the Axiological Argument. Another interpretation of the problem identifies the crux of the problem elsewhere. On this alternative reading the phenomenon of adaptation provides an argument for the view that people are limited in their abilities to evaluate their own happiness. This interpretation of the adaptation problem—the Epistemic Argument—does not draw upon a

[13] There are at least two other targets for which adaptation is discussed to cause a problem. The first is the view that social benefits should be distributed according to happiness measures. The second is the view that that rationality requires that an agent act on her preferences. For the latter, see Bovens, (1992), Bruckner (2009, 2011), and Colburn (2011)

view on the nature of wellbeing, but only on our ability to evaluate our own psychological states.

There is, however, a third perspective on the adaptation phenomenon, namely, that adaptation does not pose a problem to the SWB-WB view at all. On this perspective, adaptation to negative circumstances genuinely improves one's life; and adaptation to positive circumstances—such as hedonic treadmill adaptation (Layard 2005)—genuinely mitigates an increase in wellbeing from improved circumstances (Bruckner 2009; Feldman 2010, chap. 8). This view is not only common among philosophers, but also among SWB researchers. Richard Layard, for instance argues: "Clearly the secret of happiness is to seek out those good things that you can never fully adapt to" (Layard 2005, 49; see also Comim 2005).

I argue that there is a genuine *problem* of adaptation. However, I do believe the different interpretations of the problem have been a source of confusion that has left space for the perspective that adaptation is not actually problematic for the SWB-WB view. The plausibility of the view that adaptation is not a problem depends on the plausibility of the views that *do* take adaptation to be a problem. Biting the bullet on the problem of adaptation may be a plausible position, but whether it is in fact a problem depends on how we understand the adaptation problem. In this chapter, I have two goals. First, I want to convince the reader that there are indeed two separate problems of adaptation for the SWB-WB account that are distinct and have different implications. Secondly, while most philosophers seem to interpret the adaptation problem axiologically, I provide arguments for why the Epistemic Argument is a particularly salient problem for the SWB-WB account.

SWB measures come in two forms: measures of happiness and measures of life-satisfaction.[14] In the philosophical literature, life-satisfaction views on wellbeing—i.e. taking a person's attitude towards her life as a whole to be constitutive of wellbeing[15]—are significantly different from hedonic views—i.e. taking overall pleasure, or enjoyment, of experiences in life to be constitutive of wellbeing (e.g. Crisp 2006;

[14] Some philosophers as well as SWB researchers take the view that SWB is a measure of desire-satisfaction views of wellbeing (Bruckner 2010; Schimmack 2009). On this view, the epistemic and Axiological Arguments can also be made, but in a slightly different form. For the purpose of simplicity, I will focus on the case of (psychological) happiness and wellbeing.

[15] (see Sumner 1996) However, for Sumner, wellbeing only consists in life-satisfaction when a person's life-satisfaction is "authentic"; that is, autonomous and informed.

Tännsjö 2007).[16] Both can be seen as happiness-accounts, in the sense that both life satisfaction and pleasure are popular interpretations of happiness (Haybron 2005); though, they differ significantly on what happiness entails. In the empirical literature, the concept of happiness and life-satisfaction are generally not seen as contrasting (e.g. Veenhoven 2000), though sometimes as different components of SWB.[17] For the purpose of simplicity, I will mostly focus on the general notion of happiness, without making this distinction.[18] Nevertheless, at some points in the argument the distinction will be important, at which point I will address this explicitly.

2. Adaptation

The problem of adaptation has been introduced in the context of welfare measurement by Amartya Sen. Sen has stressed the importance of adaptation in considering the "utilitarian approach",[19] or "happiness approach" repeatedly in his work (Sen 1985a, 1985b, 1999, 2008, 2009). In *On Ethics and Economics* he formulates it as follows:

> [T]he hopeless beggar, the precarious landless labourer, the dominated housewife, the hardened unemployed or the over-exhausted coolie may all take pleasures in small mercies, and manage to suppress intense suffering for the necessity of continuing survival, but it would be ethically deeply mistaken to attach a correspondingly small value to the loss of their wellbeing because of this survival strategy (1987, 45–46).

In more recent formulations, Sen focusses more specifically on the happiness scales used in SWB research: "(…) the use of the happiness scale can be quite misleading if it leads to ignoring the significance of

[16] The use of "pleasure" is sometimes considered to have confusing connotations, for which reason the term "enjoyment" is often used by contemporary hedonists without intending a change in meaning (Crisp 2006)

[17] Both life satisfaction views (e.g. Dolan, Peasgood, and White 2008) as well as (Benthamite) hedonic views (Kahneman, Wakker, and Sarin 1997; e.g. Veenhoven 2000; Blanchflower and Oswald 2004) are sometimes considered to be the central concept behind the empirical literature on SWB. See also chapter 4.

[18] Sen does not make the distinction (see below). However, it is important to consider that the problem is significantly different for different conceptions of happiness.

[19] Needless to say, utilitarianism comes with a commitment to sum-ranking that is not relevant for the present purpose, as it is unrelated to identifying happiness with wellbeing.

other deprivations that may not be at all well-judged in the scale of happiness" (2009, 282).

That these examples pose a serious threat to the SWB-WB view should be clear. If a person clearly has a low wellbeing, but nevertheless has a high reported happiness or satisfaction with life, reported happiness or satisfaction with life are bad measures of her wellbeing. However, Sen does not specify exactly why he believes this to be the case. On an axiological reading, the problem is that happiness and wellbeing do not correlate well even if we are perfectly able to judge our own happiness. On this reading happiness and wellbeing are simply not the same:

The Axiological Argument:

1) The happy deprived are genuinely happy
2) The happy deprived do not have a correspondingly high wellbeing
3) Hence, genuine happiness and wellbeing are distinct

Those who endorse the Epistemic Argument, do not buy into the first premise of the Axiological Argument—the deprived in Sen's examples do not appear to be genuinely happy. While they agree that the people in Sen's example do not have a high degree of wellbeing, the reason for this is not (only) that happiness does not constitute wellbeing, but that under these conditions people are bad evaluators of their own happiness.

The Epistemic Argument:

1) The deprived are not happy
2) The deprived do report to be happy
3) Hence, reported happiness is a bad indicator of genuine happiness.

The Axiological Argument is essentially a philosophical argument about the nature of wellbeing. On this interpretation, the problem of adaptation is a problem for philosophical theories that identify wellbeing with happiness. In particular, both accounts of happiness we have discussed (pleasure or satisfaction with life) conceive of happiness in terms of mental states.[20] While mental-state accounts of wellbeing were prominent in the 19th century, the view lost popularity due to a number of prominent

[20] Defining happiness in terms of mental-states is not completely uncontroversial. Daniel Haybron defends a view on which happiness is constituted by emotional states, which need not have phenomenological components, further discussed below. However, this is solely an account of happiness not of wellbeing.

counter-examples that were formulated against it (Weijers 2011a; Silverstein 2000). Most notable among them is Robert Nozick's experience machine objection: Imagine that there would be a machine that would create a dream world for you if you plug in, in which you can experience the most incredible things (1974). Your life would be highly pleasurable and you would feel deeply satisfied. Nevertheless, the objection goes, a life lived in an experience machine would not be considered a fully good life, and thus, while this life would be optimal in terms of happiness, it would not be in terms of wellbeing (see Weijers and Schouten 2013 for a recent review).

The view that adaptation is mostly a problem for the conceptual identification of wellbeing and happiness—just like Nozick's experience machine example—is not rare in the literature. Erik Angner, for instance, puts the two problems at par: "Philosophers have traditionally made the point [that happiness is not wellbeing] by reference to thought experiments like Robert Nozick's experience machine, (…), or evocative vignettes like Amartya Sen's descriptions of destitute beggars, landless labourers, overworked servants, and subjugated housewives." (Angner 2013, 233). Similar interpretations are given by many philosophers writing on the topic (Sumner 1996; Tiberius and Hall 2010; Austin 2016).

While the Epistemic Argument is less widespread, there is some recognition that the Axiological Argument is not the only way of analysing what problem(s) adaptation poses to the SWB-WB view. In particular, Marc Chekola, in a wider discussion about happiness, observes that there are two different ways of looking at the problem:

> One would be to claim that the person thinks he's happy, but he really isn't. (…) Another possibility, and the one I prefer, is to allow that he may indeed have a happy life, but one involving severe and unjustified limitations. Were he to have more opportunities open to him for a life with richer alternatives he would have a better life. So he may well be living a happy life, but not such a good life (Chekola 2007, 72).

While Chekola prefers the Axiological Argument, he acknowledges that it is not the only way to see the problem. There are also philosophers writing on the topic who emphasize the epistemic challenge that adaptation poses. In an article called "Do we know how happy we are?" Daniel Haybron writes:

> Everyone knows that we often adapt to things over time: what was once pleasing now leaves no impression or seems tiresome, and what used to be highly irritating is now just another feature of the landscape. Could it also be that some things are lastingly pleasant or unpleasant, while our *awareness* of them fades? I would suggest that it can (2007a, 400).[21]

The conclusions of the two separate arguments can both be held at the same time—happiness may not identify with wellbeing, while at the same time, happiness and people's perceptions of happiness may diverge as well. However, it is also perfectly possible to accept one argument without accepting the other.[22] The two problems for the SWB-WB view are thus analytically independent but compatible.

3. Adaptation as an axiological problem

Is the problem of adaptation viewed from the perspective of the Axiological Argument convincing? While many philosophers commenting on happiness research take this perspective, I will argue that it is not. The Argument suffers from a number of weaknesses, but the most serious weakness is that the counter-example it is based on leaves much room for interpretations compatible with happiness-accounts of wellbeing; this makes the argument vacuous. Rather than showing that such views fail to be plausible in cases of adaptation, it *presupposes* it.

First, regardless of whether those defending a happiness-account of wellbeing *should* be convinced by the argument, it is important to point out that few happiness researchers have been affected much by the force of the Axiological Argument. Many researchers take measures of SWB to be a direct measure of general human wellbeing even if they acknowledge

[21] As a matter of fact, the epistemic interpretation of adaptation is also covered by what Daniel Haybron calls as 'scale norming': "Scale norming can be a source of adaptation. Insofar as this happens, then we have a second reason for thinking that hedonic adaptation may be less extensive than self-reports would suggest: for these reports may reflect a kind of 'scaling adaptation,' in which subjects' scales change over time. Lasting changes in hedonic state may thus be obscured by adjustments in the scales we use to rate our experience" (Haybron 2007a, 404)

[22] Sen's citations given above do not clearly favour one of the interpretations of the argument. There are places in which they do. For instance, in *On Ethics and Economics* Sen writes that there is a "basic problem", "to wit, the insufficient depth of the criterion of happiness or desire-fulfilment in judging a person's wellbeing" (1987, 46), indicating an axiological interpretation. Nevertheless, in *The Idea of Justice*, Sen concludes that from the adaptation problem: "our perceptions may tend to blind us to the deprivations that we do actually have, which a clearer and more informed understanding can bring out" (p. 284), indicating an epistemic interpretation. There is thus support for both arguments in Sen.

Sen's adaptation argument (see for example Layard 2005; Dolan, Peasgood, and White 2008; Helliwell and Barrington-Leigh 2010). Perhaps this is due to a substantive disagreement with the argument, but that is not often spelled out. Rather, Sen's argument is often rejected on the basis of simply being mistaken empirically (see for example D. A. Clark 2009; D'Ambrosio, Clark, and Ghislandi 2016; Suppa 2015). The poor do not regard themselves as happy, neither do the unemployed. This empirical argument avoids the more crucial conceptual point that philosophers have in mind.

There are at least two prima facie problems for the Axiological Argument. At least when it comes to the hedonic interpretation of happiness, it is not at all clear whether the first premise—that the happy deprived are genuinely happy—is plausible.[23] The compatibility of deprivation and pleasure that is assumed is not at all obvious. First, we must observe that the deprived are highly likely to experience many disadvantages in their life which negatively affect their happiness: becoming ill, being overworked, the loss of loved ones who die too soon, etc. Even if they do adapt to their circumstances must they feel the strain of these disadvantages. The claim that the deprived can be happy only seems plausible if the standards of what it means to be happy are not set very high, in which case the conclusion of the argument loses support. A second prima facie problem with the first premise is that even if the deprived happy are genuinely happy when they report it, their lives as a whole may be less happy in the probable case that deprivation leads to a reduction in the length of their life. In short, being deprived—i.e. lacking necessities of life—does not go without consequences, even on happiness-accounts of wellbeing.

The point that it is conceptually possible to be deprived and still be genuinely happy is not undermined if these observations are correct. But scrutiny reveals that such conceptual possibilities may be more hypothetical than Sen makes it seem.

The second premise—that the happy deprived do not have a correspondingly high wellbeing—is also contentious, as it is based on intuitions that are very unlikely to be shared by someone who also has intuitions supporting a happiness account of wellbeing. Like the

[23] As life satisfaction may be more robust with respect to personal tragedies, this problem may not have force if it comes to life satisfaction views of wellbeing. The same caveat does not apply to the second prima facie problem. The fact that deprivations rob someone of their ability to be happy, or satisfied, arguably still holds with respect to this view.

Experience Machine counter-example, the Axiological Argument uses the adaptation phenomenon as an intuition-pump. Just like the Experience Machine objection shows that, even from the perspective of the mental-state theorists, there is something counter-intuitive about mental-statism in certain cases, the Axiological Argument counts on the reader intuitively agreeing with the second premise. Even a fierce defender of mental-state accounts has to admit that there is *something* unsatisfactory about saying that a person in the experience machine lives a fully prudentially good life (Crisp 2006).

But, does the same apply to adaptation? If we start from the intuition that wellbeing consists in happiness, it is unlikely that we also have the intuition that a genuinely happy person living in deprivation is not leading a good life. In fact, the intuition that an adapted poor person does not lead a happy life may seem quite paternalistic to someone with intuitions supporting happiness-based account on wellbeing. For instance, Marc Fleurbaey and Didier Blanchet write:

> If happiness is really the ultimate goal of people in life, the [objection] (…) [is] not compelling. (…) Sen's objection points to the real phenomenon of adaptation, but the correct attitude about this phenomenon is to worry about the ills to which people do not adapt, such as pain and noise, rather than insisting that the ills to which they do adapt are still priorities (2013, 169).

The Axiological Argument does not demonstrate that the judgement that the happy deprived are leading lives with a high degree of wellbeing is counter-intuitive; it simply *assumes* that it is. In this sense, it is question begging. The intuition is not obvious and *not independent* of the view one holds on the nature of wellbeing. Someone defending a happiness-account of wellbeing may agree that the experience machine example is counter-intuitive for her view, but is unlikely to share the intuition that the happy deprived are not leading good lives.

If the deprived really do have the same quality of experience (and live equally long lives) it is not obvious that their lives are still worse in virtue of having lowered aspirations. There has been a wide array of schools of thought that have emphasized that the key to a good life is living a simple life, satisfying only a minimal amount of ambitions and desires, such as Buddhist, Epicurean and Stoic thought; but the idea arguably also captures a key Christian insight (McMahon 2004; Harris 2014). It is not at all implausible that a reduction of desires and ambitions

may genuinely improve a person's life by making her happier. In short, neither of the premises supporting the Axiological Argument is obvious, and taking them for granted begs the question.

There is a final, more pragmatic reason to resist the Axiological Argument in the context of wellbeing measurement, which does not concern the specifics of the Axiological Argument. The wellbeing debate has known a number of instances where intuitions of philosophers have gone in different directions. Despite Nozick's experience machine, there are still mental-statists (see Weijers 2014), and despite well-known counter-examples to desire-satisfactionism (such as 1971 grass-counter; or Parfit 1984's stranger on the bus) there are still defenders who are willing to bite the bullet (Lukas 2009). Because intuitions clash, the debate is not easily resolved. Adaptation, as an Axiological Argument, suffers from the same fate. There is something unfruitful about the usage of intuition-pumps in this context: because intuitions clash, they are unlikely to resolve debates. Thus, regardless of whether the Axiological Argument is question begging or not, an argument that relies on contentious intuitions does not stand on firm ground.

4. Adaptation as an epistemic problem

The epistemic version of the adaptation argument, as I will argue in this section, succeeds in providing a convincing argument that does not rely on contentious intuitions about wellbeing.

The idea that we are imperfectly able to evaluate our own happiness is actually a widespread idea (Haybron 2007a; Tännsjö 2007; Marsh 2014; but also Mill 1871 see chapter 4).[24] There are a variety of ways in which the Epistemic Argument can be made precise. An important question that needs to be addressed is, How could one possibly be incorrect about their own happiness? In fact, there are a number of ways in which adaptation may lead to a misjudgement of a psychological state. Below I briefly discuss these issues and then provide a thought experiment—borrowed from Marc Fleurbaey and Didier Blanchet (2013)—to argue that adaptation poses a severe epistemic challenge to the SWB-WB view.

To appreciate the epistemic argument one must first consider how different happiness-accounts of wellbeing vary. Hedonism about

[24] However, only Haybron explicitly cites the adaptation phenomenon as an argument in favour of such a view

happiness comes in various forms, each with different epistemic challenges. While some hedonists maintain that pleasure is a specific experience (Tännsjö 2007), others (starting from Mill 1871) take pleasure to be heterogeneous, with some types of pleasurable experience being of a higher quality than others (see also Crisp 2006).[25] Life satisfaction views are epistemically significantly different from these views because they take happiness to be a person's self-assessment of life, which seems more accessible from a researcher's perspective than pleasurability of experience (Sumner 1996). A different notion of happiness is Haybron's recently developed account on which happiness is an emotional state, which may or may not directly enter experience (Haybron 2005, 2008).

What is required for the Epistemic Argument to be sound is a conceptual distinction between the *judgement of one's own happiness* and happiness *itself*. For Haybron's emotional state view this is most evidently the case. On Haybron's view stress, anxiety, and even depression, may (to some extent) go unnoticed by people even if these emotional states do constitute unhappiness (see also Haybron 2007a). A person may judge herself to be happy, while she is under more stress than she realizes. For qualitative hedonists, like Mill, there is also quite clearly such a distinction (see also Schmidt-Petri 2003, 2006). Mill famously argued that people who have only experienced low-quality pleasures believe that they are happy, while people who have experienced high-quality pleasures may be less satisfied (by comparison) but nevertheless are happier. Even monist hedonists draw the same distinction. Torbjörn Tännsjö, in an article defending monist hedonism, writes:

> The fact that I can directly experience (introspectively) what hedonic situation I am in, does not presuppose that I can always make correct judgements about it. It is certainly true that, at any time, I feel what I feel, but this does not mean that my description of my state must be correct. And when I compare the state I am in right now, and the state I was in some time ago, I may very well reach the wrong conclusion (2007, 86).

However, on the life satisfaction view, the distinction between judgement of one's own happiness and happiness itself is not as obvious. Could someone judge her own satisfaction with life wrongly? In order to

[25] Fred Feldman (2010) also defends a version of the view. However, his view differs from other hedonists because he takes pleasure to be attitudinal.

understand this question it is important to see the difference between *content errors of judgements* and *scale errors of judgements.*[26] Making a content error of judgement involves a failure to take into account a relevant part of the concept in a judgement of happiness. When someone misidentifies her own happiness, or misses out on an important part of happiness, she commits a content error. Making a scale error, on the other hand, means that the degree of happiness is not proportionately identified in relation to an intended scale. The concept of scale error is illustrated in case of making a judgement about length. Because the concept of length is quite clear, it is not easily misidentified. However, in judging whether something is "tall" or not, different people may have different views. A Filipino would most likely judge me—roughly 1.80 meters in height—to be tall, while for Dutch standards, I am actually quite small.[27] Different people may use different standards to make judgements of degree.

Content errors of judgement may be definitionally ruled out in case of the life satisfaction conception of happiness, because it may be conceptually impossible to misidentify one's own satisfaction. Scale errors, however, are not. There is at least one way in which two people who report equal degrees of satisfaction may not in fact be equally happy, even on a life satisfaction-view of happiness. Just like in the case of length, people may hold different standards about the meaning of "very satisfied", in particular about the meaning of "very". A person who has experienced a large amount of satisfaction in life and is back at a normal level will most likely judge her satisfaction to be lower than someone who comes from a very dissatisfied state. So, even for life satisfaction views—for which the possibility of content errors may be excluded—there is a conceptual distinction between actual happiness and happiness judgement, which is due to the possibility of scaling errors. Two people who equally judge themselves to be "very satisfied" with their life, may not be equally satisfied, if their interpretation of degree (in this case "very") is not the same. By focusing on scaling errors, the Epistemic Argument can now be precisely formulated so that it applies to the variety of happiness conceptions that I discussed above:

[26] Taylor (2014) discusses a similar distinction in the adaptation context.
[27] I do not want to argue, of course, that any of these perspectives is correct. There is no context-independent standard for counting as tall. So, "error" may be a misleading term. What is important though is that people have diverging standards on what is "tall", so that taking any one standard will make the other person's judgement erroneous.

A. When someone undergoes adaptation, she changes the standards by which she evaluates her happiness.
B. For this reason, a person who has undergone adaptation applies different standards of evaluation to their happiness than people who have not undergone the same (degree of) adaptation.
C. Reported happiness does not represent the degree of happiness well in comparisons, when two reports have resulted from different degrees of adaptation.

So far, I have argued that the Epistemic Argument is valid. But is it also sound? One example which illustrates its soundness is the debate about the Easterlin paradox. The paradox is based on findings which suggest that while the rich are reportedly happier than the poor within countries, and rich countries are happier on average than poor countries, the increase in prosperity of the past four or five decades has not led to significant increases in happiness scores over time in western societies (A. E. Clark, Frijters, and Shields 2008; Stevenson and Wolfers 2008). Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers for instance report the noted problem that SWB may not be informative of quality of life over time because it captures people's judgements of their "relative wellbeing": "If individuals assess their life relative to contemporary standards, then as countries and the world grow richer, reported satisfaction may not change" (2008, 24). Marc Fleurbaey and Didier Blanchet provide us with the following thought experiment to illustrate this point:

> Imagine a scenario in which, over the next century, the situation of European countries stagnates, whereas Northern America benefits from a multiplication of its GDP per capita by 10, and the life expectancy of its population doubles (this would mimic the current gap between the rich countries and the poor countries). The Weber-Fechner interpretation would have it that European satisfaction would remain as high as it is nowadays. It appears more realistic to conjecture that, contemplating the much greater standard of living and longevity in Northern America, the Europeans would revise their view of what the "best possible life" is and would have a substantially lower satisfaction as a result. (2013, 189–90) [28]

[28] Fleurbaey and Blanchet only describe the Axiological Argument of adaptation under the heading of adaptation, and do not describe this thought experiment as adaptation. However, as it illustrates quite clearly what I mean by adaptation in the Epistemic

There are two aspects of Fleurbaey and Blanchet's illustration that are particularly powerful. First, it not only shows that it is plausible that people do adapt their standards of evaluation, but it also illustrates how absurd it would be if people would not. It is almost unthinkable that Europeans would judge their own happiness by the same standards in the scenario where the US maintains the standards of living of today, as they would in the scenario that they describe. In other words, it is almost unthinkable that people's benchmarks would *not* adapt, even though their lives do not change substantively. Second, Fleurbaey and Blanchet's suggestion that our standards adapt explains—or is compatible with—many of the behaviours of the SWB data. It explains why the poorest countries in the world also report the lowest levels of happiness—the standards used are influenced by their disadvantaged position. It also explains why the richest people report highest levels of happiness within countries—whose standards will be affected by their advantaged position. At the same time, it explains why countries do not appear to get happier over time if they do get richer: people apply contemporary standards to their self-evaluation. In short, it provides a plausible story that is compatible with the evidence, while their thought experiment shows that its alternative—the idea that happiness has truly been left unaffected by societal changes over time—is implausible.

If applied to Sen's examples, the Epistemic Argument would illustrate that the lives of the deprived who report to be happy are not in fact happy. Their standards of judgement have adjusted, but their actual levels of happiness have not. Deprivation not only makes a person resilient in the face of bad external circumstances, but it reduces the standards that they use to evaluate their happiness. Thus, it is plausible that people who are genuinely unhappy in perpetually deprived circumstances report less unhappiness than those who have not endured it for the same length of time. The Epistemic Argument does not take the process of adaptation to genuinely improve happiness, but only improve the perception thereof. Not only is this a plausible interpretation of Sen's examples but, if the arguments in the former section are convincing, it is a better argument for considering why there is a gap between reported happiness and wellbeing than the Axiological Argument.

Argument in terms of scale errors of judgement, I believe it is justified to use the example as such.

5. Can the Epistemic Argument be tackled empirically?

The Epistemic Argument turns the adaptation problem into an empirical challenge: can we really capture how happy people are? If correct, the Epistemic Argument provides reasons to be sceptical about this challenge. Nevertheless, even if correct, it is still an open question how bad the problem is for happiness research. It may very well be that while adaptation would distort happiness measures, the effect is small. An empirical challenge may have to be tackled by empirical technology. In fact, a potential objection to the efficacy of the Epistemic Argument is that SWB measurements have been under extensive scrutiny and that none of these tests indicate severe measurement problems with the SWB measurements.

The most common way measures are empirically tested is through construct validation. Construct validation—as it is used in psychometric practice—implies an assessment of the statistical evidence of the measures given our expectations of how these measures should behave if they were good measures of what they are aimed to measure. In the present discussion this is the concept of happiness (see Diener et al. 2009; Veenhoven 2012b; see Alexandrova and Haybron 2016 for a general critical assessment of this approach in the context of SWB). Examples of construct validation results include high correlations of SWB measures with unemployment (A. E. Clark and Oswald 1994), facial expression (Ekman, Davidson, and Friesen 1990), or neurological activity (Urry et al. 2004). Andrew Oswald and Stephan Wu (2010) construct an objective wellbeing measure on the basis of real-estate prices, and find it correlates well to aggregate happiness measures in the areas. John Helliwell (2006) discusses the predictive value of SWB measures for suicide probability. Lucas et al. (1996) show that there is a correlation between optimism and reported happiness, but the correlation is not high enough to suspect that they measure the same concept.

SWB measures have done reasonably well for the standards of construct validation. If SWB would be "just noise" (Di Tella and MacCulloch 2006, 28), as some sceptics in fact have suggested (Johns and Ormerod 2007), the measures would not pass a construct validation test. This should provide some confidence that these measures indeed capture something consistently. However, the adaptation problem does not imply that SWB is "just noise". The Epistemic Argument drives a wedge between perceived degrees of happiness and actual degrees of happiness in certain contexts. In particular, it does so when people have suffered

prolonged deprivation. If the Epistemic Argument succeeds, measures of SWB capture *perceived* degrees of happiness. Similar to *actual* degrees of happiness, we would expect perceived degrees of happiness to correlate to unemployment, facial expressions, suicide probability etc. In fact, it is likely correlated to actual happiness and in many cases very closely.

Unfortunately, an implication of the Epistemic Argument is that the wedge between perceived and actual degrees of happiness implies that there is a limit to the empirical testing of measurement problems. As measures of SWB cannot provide us with direct information on actual degrees of happiness, we cannot test how closely related actual happiness and measures of SWB truly are. What we would need are variables that are correlated with actual, not just perceived, happiness. It is difficult to think of variables that can fulfil this role. This implies that there is a limit to how much confidence construct validation can provide for measures of SWB.

Because it cannot be assessed by empirical means how bad the Epistemic Argument really is, its assessment must remain suggestive. On the one hand, we can worry that the problem is ubiquitous and severe. After all, there is no reason to assume that everyone applies the same standards of evaluation. Nevertheless, given that the study of SWB, and happiness economics in particular, concentrates on relationships at the group level, general scepticism may not be warranted. In lack of a specific worry that two groups being compared have adapted differently, it is likely that differences in measures due to different applied standards of assessment "average out" on a group level.

The real worry arises when comparisons are made between groups that have presumably adapted differently and for that reason apply different standards to assess their happiness. The problem is that in these cases, the degrees of perceived happiness do not correspond to degrees of actual happiness. To provide an example, consider the finding that Latin American countries reach high levels of reported happiness despite low levels of economic prosperity (Inglehart et al. 2008; a fortiori, Graham 2011 discusses high reports of SWB in Afghanistan). Without questioning the authors' conclusions (Latin American countries may of course indeed be very happy), it follows from the Epistemic Argument that there is good reason to doubt that the observed measures of SWB can be interpreted as degrees of happiness that can be compared among countries. Growing up in Latin American countries would likely result in different degrees of adaptation than growing up in, for example,

European countries. This would effectively make comparisons in actual happiness on the basis of SWB difficult.

Another crucial example pertains to the empirical results discussed in section 3 that have been used to argue that adaptation does not actually occur. For example, the fact that the unemployed do report low levels of SWB has been taken as evidence that adaptation does not occur. However, if the Epistemic Argument is correct, we still have good reasons to be sceptical about interpreting the degrees of perceived happiness in SWB measures as degrees of actual happiness. It may be that actual levels of happiness are more sensitive to unemployment than measures of SWB. As such, even in light of corroborating empirical findings, whether adaptation affects empirical results in such cases remains an open question.

6. Conclusion and discussion

We have arrived at the following conclusion. There are two distinct adaptation arguments against the measurability of wellbeing by means of reported happiness. While the Axiological Argument is prominent in many philosophical reflections on the field of research, I have argued that such an interpretation of the argument would not be very convincing for someone who starts with intuitions supporting a happiness account of wellbeing. Moreover, the available evidence seems to render the axiological problem vacuous. The Epistemic Argument challenges the relationship between reported and actual happiness in the context of adaptation. While there is room for a denial of the problem of adaptation of the Axiological Argument, the Epistemic Argument poses a significant problem for SWB as a measure of wellbeing. Even if the Axiological Argument does not convince you that happiness accounts of wellbeing are false, the Epistemic Argument of adaptation should convince you that we cannot measure happiness in a comparable way when adaptation has occurred. Because the Epistemic Argument does not depend on contested philosophical intuitions, it is much more difficult to bite the bullet on the adaptation problem. The problem presents a genuine challenge to the field of research in cases in which we may doubt people share standards of happiness. Consequently, adaptation *is* a genuine problem, limiting the confidence we should have in our ability to compare our own happiness to that of others.

Chapter 4: What Happiness Economics can learn from John Stuart Mill[29]

> It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides.
>
> - John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*

1. Introduction: Happiness and subjective wellbeing

"Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?" (European social survey). If you answer this question—on a scale from 0-10—with a high number, and you answer it faithfully, is your life going well for you? This question, and variations thereof, is the key measurement instrument defining the concept of subjective wellbeing to the measurement of wellbeing in the social sciences. Not every SWB researcher would answer the question with a clear "yes," but many believe that SWB can capture happiness, and that happiness is, in the very least, an important part of wellbeing (e.g. Kesebir and Diener 2008). Many researchers seem to understand SWB as a concept that is close to Bentham's notion of happiness (see Fleurbaey & Blanchet, 2013). In fact, explicit references to Bentham's philosophy are not at all rare in the SWB literature (Kahneman, Wakker, and Sarin 1997; Kahneman et al. 2004; Veenhoven 2010; Dolan and Metcalfe 2012). The particular conception of happiness that social scientists use is closely connected with the question of how—if at all—happiness can be measured. On Bentham's hedonistic perspective, measuring happiness by means of asking people about their experiences seems a straightforward methodology.

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Bentham understands happiness as a unidimensional quality of experience. On this view, it seems plausible that people are able to recognize and evaluate their own happiness. Nevertheless, Bentham's hedonism is quite controversial in philosophy for its treatment of pleasure (e.g. Nussbaum 2004; cf. Tännsjö 2007). Much criticism of the SWB approach about the measurement of happiness or wellbeing seems to have focused on the unsatisfactory features of the hedonist conception of happiness underlying the approach in one way or another (O'neill 2006; Nussbaum 2008; Sen 2008; Raibley 2012; Fleurbaey and Blanchet 2013; Stewart 2014; Crespo and Mesurado 2014). In a critical essay of the hedonistic foundation of positive psychology, Martha Nussbaum writes: "Modern psychology follows Bentham. Indeed, Kahneman explicitly traces his own conception of 'hedonic flow' to Bentham [citation supressed]". And yet, is Bentham correct?" (2008, S82). Nussbaum certainly believes that Bentham was not, and represents many fellow philosophers in this.

One way in which hedonism can be made more acceptable to those who oppose the view, is by moving towards a qualified version of hedonism, such as John Stuart Mill's view on happiness (Mill 1871; see e.g. Sen 2006; Nussbaum 2008). Mill retained Bentham's view that happiness is constituted by pleasure, but departed from Bentham by suggesting that pleasures—that is, pleasurable experiences[30]—do not only differ in terms of duration and intensity,[31] but also differ qualitatively. Because Mill's view on happiness seems more plausible to critics by virtue of its more nuanced treatment of pleasure, his view on happiness is sometimes proposed as a more attractive alternative (e.g. Nussbaum 2008). By virtue of its more nuanced treatment of pleasure, Mill's account seems to provide a more attractive and plausible basis to serve as a foundation for the study of happiness. However, Mill's view also makes happiness more difficult to measure. As I will argue, there is a perspective in Mill's view on happiness that problematizes the orthodoxy within the SWB literature to use self-reports as measures of happiness, particularly in cases where qualitatively different lives are compared. In this essay, I will analyze this perspective and its relevance for SWB research. I illustrate the problem Mill's perspective poses with

[30] I follow Schmidt-Petri (2006) here in making a distinction between "a pleasure" and "pleasure" in Mill.

[31] To Bentham, pleasures – meaning pleasurable experiences – also differ in other categories that seem to be less central here: certainty, propinquity, fecundity, purity and extent.

the example of SWB research on the happiness of parents compared to the childless. I argue that the perspective does not rely on a metaphysically demanding interpretation of Mill's qualitative hedonism, but is based on a simple and plausible assumption about the quality of experience. While on some conceptions of happiness it may seem plausible that people have the ability to evaluate their happiness independently of the kind of experiences they have already had, I argue that Mill's rejection of this idea is convincing and compatible with a variety of views on happiness. Hence, it raises serious doubts that SWB can capture happiness in a satisfactory fashion, particularly in cases where lives with qualitatively different experiences are compared.

Sections 2 and 3 are preliminaries. In section 2, a necessary condition for measuring happiness by means of self-reported SWB measures is discussed, and in section 3, Mill's qualitative perspective on pleasure is presented. Section 4 presents the main argument: Mill's qualitative perspective on happiness is plausible, but creates doubt it can be measured by self-reports. Section 5 discusses the example of SWB research on the effect of parenting on happiness. Objections and the relevance of Mill's perspective for alternative views on the nature of happiness are discussed in sections 6 and 7 respectively. In section 8, I discuss the relationship between this argument and the adaptation problem discussed in the previous chapter. Section 9 concludes and discusses implications for future happiness research.

2. Measuring SWB

There is a large variety of SWB research. Nevertheless, as discussed in chapter 3, we can say that SWB roughly comes in two types of constructs, which are sometimes considered to be similar in meaning, and sometimes considered to be different views on what SWB should capture: life satisfaction and happiness (e.g. Veenhoven 2010; Hansen 2012). On the Benthamite view, SWB captures pleasurable—or enjoyable[32]—experiences in life, and many SWB researchers would see an evaluation of enjoyable experiences in life to be a very similar exercise to evaluating satisfaction with life (e.g. MacKerron 2012).[33] However, some researchers do take life-

[32] Bentham uses the word "pleasure," but modern formulations of hedonism often replace "pleasurable" by "enjoyable"(Crisp 2006) to de-emphasize the connotation with bodily pleasures. I follow Crisp in using the two terms interchangeably.

[33] Ruut Veenhoven, for instance, writes: "Satisfaction is also the subjective experience Jeremy

satisfaction to be an altogether different conception of happiness (see Haybron 2007b for a discussion), and thereby deviate from the Benthamite underpinnings I have thus far described. It is also common to understand life satisfaction as a wholly different concept from happiness altogether. For the purposes of simplicity, I will focus my attention on SWB research that aims to capture a hedonistic notion of happiness. However, in section 6 I will address some of the implications of the argument for research aimed at capturing life satisfaction conceptions of happiness as well.

The study of subjective wellbeing is not necessarily committed to the view that subjective wellbeing is a sufficiently good measure of wellbeing simpliciter, though many authors are (see Angner 2010). What the field of study is committed to is the view that subjective experiences, or attitudes towards life, can be meaningfully rated on a scale with a reasonably limited amount of error (e.g. Ferrer-i-Carbonell 2002).[34] This does not imply that someone with a higher self-reported happiness rating is necessarily happier than someone with a lower rating (see Angner 2013); people may be imperfect in their judgment. People may make mistakes. However, in order for SWB to capture happiness, it is required that these errors occur randomly—in other words, that they are not structural. The precise formulation of this requirement may depend on the kind of comparison of SWB that is made. But consider, for example, that we want to compare two different groups. A significant share of one group may be overly-optimistic about their subjective wellbeing, such that two equally happy people would rate their happiness differently, due to such optimism. For example, if educated people tend to interpret a happiness scale differently than others, we may draw the wrong conclusions about the effect of education on happiness. In that case, SWB would be an unsatisfactory measure of happiness. More generally, in order to draw conclusions from self-reported SWB data on happiness, errors of this sort—reporting errors—need to be random. We can formulate this as follows:

Ratability: In order for a self-reported measure of subjective wellbeing to be meaningful, people need to be able to rate their subjective

Bentham had in mind" (Veenhoven 2010, 609).

[34] George MacKerron, for instance, writes: "SWB data consist, more or less by definition, of the aggregated self-reports of individuals—what people say about themselves when asked" (2012, 708).

wellbeing—be it happiness or life satisfaction—such that reporting errors do not occur structurally. In other words, different people—or, alternatively, people over time—may evaluate the same level of happiness differently, but these deviations should not have any relevant structural patterns.

3. Mill and qualitative hedonism

Hedonism is the view that happiness is constituted by the balance of pleasurable experience over painful experience. Hedonism as a theory of wellbeing additionally holds that wellbeing is constituted by happiness. This latter view is particularly controversial in philosophy,[35] but as a view about happiness, hedonism is quite popular (see Haybron 2005). Bentham, as well as Mill, held both views of hedonism, but for the present purpose we will focus on hedonism as a view on the nature of happiness. While both hedonists, Mill's view deviates from Bentham with respect to the nature of pleasure. Bentham's view on happiness is characterized by the idea that pleasure is a homogenous sensation which is shared by all pleasurable experiences (Sumner 1996; Nussbaum 2004, 2008; Crisp 2006). This feature is central to its appeal to happiness researchers. If pleasure is, indeed, a homogenous sensation, it seems plausible that it can be readily detected, and, consequently, rated by people. Moreover, the homogeneity of Bentham's view on pleasure seems to play an important role in its liberalism with respect to pleasure, such as illustrated in his well-known view that there is nothing particularly better about poetry compared to pushpin. Nevertheless, there are two problems with Bentham's account of happiness as a constituted by homogenous sensation.

Firstly, Bentham's homogenous hedonism is vulnerable to the problem that there are certain experiences that we would call enjoyable that feel very different from typical enjoyable experiences—for example, enjoyment from masochism, or from running a marathon. But there are

[35] The most widely discussed argument against this view is the experience machine objection, originally formulated by Robert Nozick (1974; cf. Kawall 1999; Silverstein 2000; Weijers 2011b; see Weijers and Schouten 2013 for a contemporary discussion). The argument is based on the following example: consider a machine which you could plug in that would create a virtual world for you in which you would have the most amazing experiences. Someone in this machine would have incredibly pleasurable experiences, and would be happy, but, Nozick argues, would not lead an enviable life.

also less trivial examples, such as Fred Feldman's (2010) example of a woman who gives birth. While she is feeling ecstatic about holding her newborn in her arms, she is also in deep physical pain. What these examples show is that pleasure does not seem to share any specific phenomenological trait.

Another problem for a homogenous view of pleasure is that on that view, any pleasurable experience can be equated with a certain amount of another pleasurable experience to produce the same amount of pleasure. In other words, while someone who likes poetry may find it more enjoyable than pushpin, as long as she enjoys pushpin as well, at some point a large amount of pushpin will be more enjoyable than some amount of poetry. This can lead to deeply counter-intuitive conclusions. One well-known counter-example illustrating this problem is the example of the long oyster life (Crisp 2006). While an oyster may only experience some pleasure, a very long oyster life would have to be more pleasurable than a human life that lasts eighty years. If it is not, the life of the oyster can be extended, such that at some point, the pleasure enjoyed in the oyster's life must compensate for the more intense pleasure of a human life. Many find the conclusion that the very long life of an oyster is more enjoyable than a normal human life counter-intuitive.

These problems for Bentham's account resonate in some of the criticism on the conceptual framework employed by SWB researchers. Nussbaum, for instance, writes: "The apparent fact that pleasures differ in quality, that the pleasure of steak eating is quite different from the pleasure of listening to Mahler's Tenth, bothered Bentham not at all; he does not discuss such examples" (2008; see Crespo and Mesurado 2014 for similar concerns).

Mill was aware of such criticisms of hedonism—in particular, by the problem that any pleasure can be compensated for by some amount of another pleasure—and addresses them in *Utilitarianism*. Mill believed that many classical hedonist theories were able to deal with such objections to some extent by arguing that mental pleasures were better than bodily pleasures in terms of "permanency, safety, uncostliness, etc." (Mill 1871, 56). However, Mill believed that such solutions were not sufficiently able to distinguish higher and lower experiences, such as that of a human life, and that of an oyster. Mill argued that there is a difference *in kind* between some pleasures in life: "It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on

quantity alone" (1871, 56). Intuitively, there is something very attractive about Mill's account of happiness. The experience of climbing the Kilimanjaro does not only differ from a day of playing board games in the amount and intensity of pleasure involved, the experience also seems qualitatively different. In a recent defense, Roger Crisp (2006) argues that what all such different enjoyable experiences share is that they are enjoyable, but that apart from that, they may all feel different.

There are different interpretations of how Mill's view should be made more precise. While it is clear that Mill believed that some pleasures were qualitatively different from others, there is a variety of views on why that is. In particular, there is much debate about the question of whether Mill's qualitative hedonism implies that a pleasure of a certain quality is preferred to any amount of pleasures of a lower quality. In other words, are qualitatively different pleasures lexicographically ordered? In *Utilitarianism,* Mill attempts to clarify his meaning of qualitative difference by reference to *competent judges*:

> "If one of two [pleasures] is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account." (1871, 56).

On the classical view of interpreting Mill—the lexicographical view—the passage is read as explaining a lexicographical difference between qualitatively different pleasures (Riley 2003; see Booher 2007). On this view, the pleasure experienced from higher pleasures can never be compensated by *any* amount of lower pleasures. This view is wedded to the idea that pleasurable experiences are intrinsically different from each other with respect to the pleasure they produce (Schmidt-Petri 2006). On the lexicographical view, either higher pleasures *feel* infinitely better, or they simply *are* infinitely more pleasurable than lower pleasures for other reasons. Jonathan Riley (1999, 2003) defends the view. The view is controversial because it begs the question of what it is about pleasures that makes them qualitatively different. Surely some experiences feel different in kind, but why would we assume that some are of such a higher quality that they are lexicographically ordered with respect to pleasure? Reading poetry does not really seem to feel infinitely more

pleasurable than pushpin. However, if poetry is infinitely better *despite* it not feeling infinitely better, the view seems to deviate from hedonism (Scarre 1997). Riley (1999) argues that some experiences do indeed feel infinitely more pleasurable than others. While such a defense is internally consistent, it relies heavily on the existence of an infinite difference of pleasure in felt experiences, a view that is highly contestable.

A second reading—the epistemological view—is provided by Christoph Schmidt-Petri (2003, 2006; but also Booher 2007; Crisp 2006; see also Saunders 2011 for a discussion). In his view, Mill's qualitatively different pleasures need not imply that the higher pleasures are preferred to *any* amount of lower pleasures. A higher pleasure is definitely a lot more pleasurable than a lower one, but that does not mean that their difference in pleasure needs to be considered lexicographic. In Schmidt-Petri's account, Mill's passage suggests that if competent judges prefer one pleasure over an infinite amount of another pleasure, they are justified in ascribing a difference in quality between the pleasurable experiences, but it need not imply that any qualitative difference means that the experiences are infinitely more—or less—pleasurable. Schmidt-Petri understands Mill's passage as making an epistemological point: people who have not experienced higher pleasures are not able to appreciate them and compare them to lower pleasures. Some enjoyable experiences last equally long, and are equally intense as other experiences, but nevertheless produce more pleasure. The only way to learn whether this is the case is to experience both and judge.

In short, while there are two radically different interpretations of Mill's views on qualitative differences in pleasure, both views consider a person who has not experienced a certain pleasure to be in a disadvantaged position to evaluate it. We can call this the qualitative view of pleasure, or more generally, the Qualitative View of Experiences (**QVE**).

QVE: There are differences in the quality of experiences, and the variety of qualities of experience we have had influences the way we evaluate them. Two experiences that are of a different quality can only be fully evaluated by someone who has experienced both.[36]

[36] This need not imply that people cannot make justified guesses about other people's happiness. We may be justified in judging people in deprived circumstances to be unhappy, without having experienced it. Our imaginative powers are likely to be roughly reliable, especially if it comes to obvious misery. However, the QVE implies that when we experience something new, it changes how we evaluate our *own* happiness.

A person who has not fully experienced higher pleasures may believe her life is happy. But, as the addendum to Mill's famous passage cited in the epigraph illustrates: Mill believes that a person who has only experienced lower pleasures is in a bad position to make a comparison of happiness between the higher and lower pleasures. For Mill, this has an important implication for people's own perceptions of their happiness, or for the importance of their sense of satisfaction. Mill argues: "Whoever supposes that … the superior being, in anything like equal circumstances, is not happier than the inferior, confounds the two very different ideas, of happiness, and content" (57). A person can be content, feel satisfied, and believe herself to be happy, but when this is based on having pleasurable experiences of a low quality, her happiness may not weigh up against the higher quality experiences of a person who does not feel quite as satisfied, and does not believe herself to be happy.

Mill's language may be archaic and elitist. But consider the example of someone who has never been in a committed relationship. She may believe it to be dull and restrictive, and be perfectly satisfied with the situation as it is. Mill's perspective indicates that it may happen that—if being in a committed relationship is a higher pleasure for her—after being in such a relationship, she learns that it is much more enjoyable than not being in one. She may, after learning this, be equally satisfied, or even less satisfied, but this need not imply that it is less enjoyable. According to Mill's perspective that I want to defend here, such experiences can alter the way we evaluate our own happiness.

4. Mill's qualitative perspective and SWB

QVE, if correct, poses a problem for ratability, in case lives are compared that are constituted by qualitatively different experiences. If correct, a person who believes herself to be unhappy may, in fact, be happier than a person who perceives herself as happy. In other words, if we use people's own perception as a basis for judging happiness, people who have experienced few high pleasures would be judged overly optimistically. In order to meet ratability, people should not evaluate their current experiences differently purely on the basis of what they have experienced in the past. In order to meet ratability, the judgment of "very happy" for someone who has experienced few higher pleasures should correspond to the level of happiness of someone who has experienced a lot of higher pleasures and also judges herself to be "very happy". However, if QVE is true, their judgments have different

consequences for happiness, and they cannot be considered equally happy. This consequence is particularly clear on a lexicographical interpretation of qualities. In order to see this, consider the following objection to ratability from a lexicographical perspective:

A) There are lexicographical differences in the quality of experiences, such that some pleasurable experiences are lexicographically more pleasurable than others.
B) Because of this lexicographical difference, the difference between higher and lower pleasures can only be evaluated by those who have experienced both. (The lexicographical version of the Quality View of Experiences (**QVE**$_L$)).
C) Those who have experienced only lower pleasurable experiences are not able to evaluate the value of higher pleasurable experiences in the same way as those who have experienced both.
D) In order for self-reported SWB research to meet ratability, different subjects—or, depending on the research question, subjects over time—need to be able to evaluate the same pleasures in the same way.
E) Subjects who have experienced only the lower pleasures cannot evaluate higher pleasures in the same way as people who have experienced both.
F) SWB does not meet the ratability requirement.

On this objection, a qualitative hedonist would not accept that differences in SWB correspond to differences in happiness if there are qualitative differences in the experiences they have had. This may not be so surprising, nor may it be bothersome to a SWB researcher. The lexicographical interpretation of Mill's view may be more acceptable to people who are critical of Bentham, but may not be an attractive position for SWB researchers. After all, arguably, Mill's conception of higher and lower pleasures seems somewhat elitist: favoring some activities—typically those that people of higher classes would like—over others, on seemingly arbitrary grounds. Some SWB researchers have taken an explicit liberal stance on this issue. If a person playing simple video games says he is happy, a researcher should accept this person's judgment. There is no reason to overrule it because the researcher finds this person's judgment implausible. Martin Binder calls the liberal character of SWB an attractive normative feature of SWB, as it avoids the

danger of paternalism (Binder 2014).[37] SWB researchers may reject the lexicographical account and ignore the lexicographical QVE objection, because its first premise (A) is rejected.

Much of the work in the lexicographical QVE objection is done by the first two premises. However, on an epistemological interpretation of Mill's view, QVE still follows, even if premises (A) and (B) are false. The beginning of the argument—the epistemological formulation of the QVE objection—would then be as follows:

A*) There are differences in the quality of experiences, such that knowing how long and intense a certain pleasurable experience is, is not sufficient to evaluate how pleasurable it is.

B*) Because differences in quality of experiences can only be known after they have been experienced, the difference between two qualitatively different experiences can only be evaluated by those who have experienced both (the epistemological version of the Qualitative View of Experience (**QVE**$_E$)).

The argument would continue in the same way as the lexicographical version of the objection. On this reading, a person who spends her days playing simple computer games (a modern variant of pushpin, perhaps) would be satisfied, and may believe herself to be very happy, but could only know if her life is happier than that of a poet, or scientist, when she has, in fact, experienced the life of a scientist or poet. As a poet or scientist has probably known the experience of playing a computer game, they are in a better position to evaluate both lives. The experiences are clearly different in kind. Knowing what it is like to spend your days playing computer games probably puts you in the position to evaluate how the pleasure of playing one hour compares to playing two hours. These are differences in quantity. However, it does not put you in the position to evaluate how the pleasure of playing video games compares to finishing a beautiful poem. This view of qualitative difference in pleasure comes with fewer problematic commitments than the lexicographical view. We need not presuppose that the pleasure of finishing a beautiful poem is *infinitely*, or *lexicographically* more

[37] As discussed above, within philosophical discourse there is also some debate about whether qualitative hedonism in its lexicographical interpretation is a coherent and plausible position to hold (Scarre 1997; cf. Feldman 1995; Riley 1999).

pleasurable than playing computer games, in order to appreciate that the pleasures are different epistemically: experiencing one pleasure tells you little about experiencing the other. QVE is thus not committed to an elitist view that certain kind of experiences are infinitely more enjoyable despite them not feeling as such. At the same time, it is not committed to identify every person who says she is happy as indeed being happy, because it illustrates that people may have a perception of their own happiness that is contingent on their past experiences.

To sum up: Mill provides an account of happiness in which happiness is constituted by pleasure that seems richer and more plausible than Bentham's account of happiness that is often cited in the SWB literature. However, Mill's qualitative view and his perspective on happiness evaluation (QVE) clash with a fundamental assumption in current SWB research: ratability. While one reading of Mill's view comes with its own difficulties, QVE can be formulated so that it relies only on a very commonsensical assumption that Mill stresses: some experiences can only be compared to others by those who have experienced both (A* and B*).

5. Example: children and happiness

The literature on SWB is expansive and various. It is not fair to make general statements regarding the neglect of the qualitative perspective in pleasurable experiences in the literature. However, one example in which the qualitative perspective seems particularly relevant, but has not been sufficiently recognized, is the study of major life changes, in particular, that of becoming a parent. Perhaps surprisingly, the literature seems in agreement that the average effect of becoming a parent on happiness is negative or close to zero. In a review of the literature, Thomas Hansen (2012) describes a common "folk view" on parenting—that it makes parents happier—but argues that the empirical evidence points in the opposite direction. People generally do not become happier from having children, if we accept the evidence from SWB research. Others are more mild in their judgment of the evidence, and report that happiness may be positively affected by having children, but only "under the right conditions" (Angeles 2009). Does this count as sound evidence that becoming a parent does not make us (or most people) happier?

On Mill's qualitative view this is problematic. Having children and not having children are qualitatively very different experiences. In fact, the two are so different, that it is hard to imagine what it is like to have

children until we have them. This is exactly the point made in a recent article by Laurie Paul entitled "What you can't expect when you're expecting". In her view, having children is an *epistemically transformative experience*:

> At least in the normal case, one has a uniquely new experience when one has one's first child. Before someone becomes a parent, she has never experienced the unique state of seeing and touching her newborn child. She has never experienced the full compendium of the extremely intense series of beliefs, emotions, physical exhaustion and emotional intensity that attends the carrying, birth, presentation, and care of her very own child, and hence she does not know what it is like to have these experiences. (2015, 8).

Some empirical evidence supports the claim that parents do not have clearly worse experiences in general, but have *different* experiences. Parents may experience more stress and less pleasurable moments, also when they are with their children, but nevertheless find their activities more rewarding and find more meaning in them (White and Dolan 2009; Nelson et al. 2013). If Paul is correct in her judgment that having children is an experience that we cannot evaluate until we have experienced it, having children and not having children are qualitatively different experiences in the QVE sense. Consequently, on Mill's QVE, asking people about their satisfaction or their rated happiness will not be informative about which of the two experiences produces more happiness. Based on the widespread view that children do make us happier, Hansen describes the finding that parents are not happy as paradoxical. However, on Mill's perspective, the conclusion that there is a paradox does not follow.[38]

A possible way forward to judging the effect of parenting on happiness on Mill's account would be to give evidential priority to the opinion of parents, perhaps by asking whether they believe their experiences have improved, or if they would want their old life back. After all, the parents seem to be the "competent judges," having experienced both a childless life and a life with children. There is little

[38] QVE does not imply that the common belief about parenting and happiness is correct. It merely implies that in cases where qualitatively different lives are compared, drawing conclusions about happiness on the basis of people's self-assessment is problematic.

scientific study that follows this, and it would deviate significantly from standard SWB methodology.[39]

6. Objections to the QVE objection

There are a number of possible objections to the claim that happiness is constituted by a combination of qualitatively different experiences whose contribution to happiness can only be judged after they have been experienced, and the problem I have argued this poses for SWB research.

A first objection may be that while ratability is often assumed in SWB studies, when more sophisticated statistical methods are used, the assumption can be relaxed without altering the results of SWB studies. This would be wrong. An influential paper about statistical methodology in SWB research is Ada Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Paul Frijters's (2004) often-cited methodological contribution that derives important conclusions from Germany's Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) on minimal assumptions about the structure of subjective wellbeing reports. Their statistical methodology assumes that people's satisfaction reports have an individually fixed ordinal relationship to an underlying function (in their case, welfare). In other words, it does not assume that my 7 on a life satisfaction scale is equal to yours, but it does assume that my 7 this year is higher than my 6 last year. This statistical methodology is significant in reducing the measurement requirements of happiness or satisfaction data greatly. However, it still implies that if a person's SWB score improves, so does her actual happiness, or wellbeing (see also Ferrer-i-Carbonell 2002). On QVE, this assumption would be problematic in instances where people go through new experiences that alter their perspective. The problem goes deeper than statistical methodology. If QVE is correct, a person may evaluate happiness in a different manner now than after having experienced something new. This goes to the heart of SWB research: a person rating her happiness lower than before may not be less happy.

A second objection may be that any view that presupposes that there are qualitatively better and worse pleasures is problematically paternalistic, even if these qualities are understood in a non-

[39] An assumption of such a methodology would be that a childless life is similar to that of the life of parents up to the moment they have children, and that having a child does not bias a person's judgment about happiness. These assumptions may be false. If that would be so, it could turn out that the question of whether parents are happier than non-parents would not be empirically answerable.

lexicographical way. This is probably a good objection against some of Mill's examples, such as his view that poetry is better than pushpin. Presupposing such hierarchies on no clear evidential ground may be considered paternalistic. Nevertheless, these views should be separated from the more abstract view that there are differences in quality between pleasures. Mill might have been wrong about the former—poetry may not be better than pushpin—but right about the latter—qualitative differences do exist. Pushpin may be of higher quality than poetry. The quality of specific experiences could even differ between different people. For *me* pushpin may be qualitatively better, while for others poetry may be better than pushpin. The QVE is thus not based on the view that certain specific pleasures are of a higher quality, but only on the view that there are qualitative differences between pleasures that make the comparison between them difficult if both have not been experienced.

7. Alternative views on happiness

Both Mill's and Bentham's conceptions of happiness are based on the view that happiness is constituted by pleasure. A possible defense of the QVE objection can be that it does not go through on alternative conceptions of happiness. However, what is important about the second formulation of the QVE objection is that it seems compatible with a number of different views on what constitutes happiness. Without subscribing to the view that some experiences feel infinitely more pleasurable than others, or are lexicographically more pleasurable despite people not feeling infinitely more pleasure, it seems plausible that some experiences are harder to compare to others without having experienced both. Premises A* and B* in the argument are not based on a particular conception on happiness, but could apply to all conceptions of happiness that acknowledge that some form of experienced happiness can only be compared to others once they have been experienced. In order to avoid the problem QVE poses for ratability, SWB would require a conceptual view of happiness that would avoid having to commit to such qualitative differences in experiences.[40]

[40] The epistemic version of the QVE objection to ratability could even apply to a Benthamite conception of happiness, once it is acknowledged that while pleasure may be unidimensional, pleasurable experiences are not, and that experiencing one pleasurable experience may alter your attitude towards others. On this view, pushpin

One alternative to hedonism is the view that happiness consists of an attitude towards your life: the life satisfaction view (e.g. Sumner 1996)—a view that is popular among SWB researchers (see Haybron 2007b). Mill seems to reject the view that attitudes are ultimately the constituents of happiness, as can be read in the distinction between happiness and contentment that he employs. Nevertheless, prima facie, it seems that an attitude view of happiness may avoid the epistemic formulation of the objection. If a person's attitude towards life is all that matters to her happiness, why would it matter whether an attitude is based on higher or lower quality experiences?

While this objection stands, it does point towards a counter-intuitive conclusion of the life satisfaction view of happiness. Consider the same person from our earlier example who spends most of her time playing computer games. This person may have a good attitude towards her life. She likes her life as it is. However, at some point, she gets a purposeful job at which she flourishes, which changes her life in many ways. In the newly-gained perspective she feels that her old attitude towards the gaming life had been inappropriate, and feels that while she has similarly positive attitudes towards her new life now as she did in the past, she is now happier. On a strict interpretation of the life satisfaction view she would have to be mistaken. After all, if her attitude towards her life is roughly the same over time, then so would be her happiness. She cannot be wrong about the attitude she had in the past. This would seem highly counter-intuitive. If we would accept that attitudes can contribute differently towards happiness depending on their appropriateness, it would be conceptually possible that she is correct. However, we have now made the life satisfaction view of happiness vulnerable to QVE: the qualities of the experiences we have had can now affect the way we evaluate comparisons between different experiences, or different lives we lead. In other words, there are qualitative differences between experiences that are sufficient for QVE_E.

Another recently developed view maintains that happiness is an emotional state quality (Haybron 2005). According to Daniel Haybron, happiness is not a experiential state, but describes our emotional state. We may be under stress, but not experience stress. In these cases, we are less happy than we would be if we were not under stress, but it is not due

and poetry may result in the same output – pleasure – but in order to know which of the two produces more, they need to be experienced.

to a difference in pleasure. Does QVE_E still pose a problem to SWB on this conception of happiness? On a first look it might not. If our emotional state were independent of our experience, we could see that the way we compare two emotional states would not depend on the qualities of the types of experiences that we have had. On the other hand, if we do evaluate our own emotional state, we are surely guided by our own experiences. Haybron himself is skeptical about our ability to know how happy we are on the grounds that we often fail to appreciate our emotional state (Haybron 2007a). In his view, there are reasons to question ratability, independent of QVE. However, some of his reasons come close to Mill's perspective. In an example, Haybron describes a person, Glen, who has lived in the city for years under severe stress, but always had the impression he was happy. But now he moves back to the rural town where he grew up. The stress falls from his shoulders and he now realizes that his life in the city was not so happy after all. What this person experienced seems to be easily described in terms of QVE_E. Glen experiences a new *kind* of experience—even though it is in some ways similar to his childhood, and he re-learns appreciating it: living a peaceful stressless life in the countryside. He now can fully appreciate the difference between two experiences: living a stressful life in the city, and a stressless one the countryside, and judges the countryside life to be superior in quality.

8. QVE objection and adaptation

The QVE is by no means the first philosophical objection against the identification of SWB with happiness. In particular, the QVE objection seems to have some similarity to the adaptation argument introduced in chapter 3 (Sen 1985a; see Qizilbash 2006a). Both objections are based on a discrepancy between satisfaction, or people's own perception of their happiness, and their actual happiness. Mozaffar Qizilbash reads in the passages from *Utilitarianism* cited above the same view that Sen expresses when he discusses examples of people in deprived circumstances who nevertheless believe themselves to be happy, but clearly do not lead high-quality lives. Moreover, Qizilbash believes Mill's view addresses Sen's adaptation concerns. While I believe adaptation and Mill's QVE address similar concerns, the points are different and QVE is more general. Originally, adaptation was formulated as a problem regarding people who changed their preferences due to the unavailability of a preferred option, which is a narrow and specific problem. Moreover,

the term "adaptation" itself seems to suggest that it applies only after a *change* in desires, preferences, or ability to be happy. QVE need not involve such change. A person may have low aspirations, and be content with low pleasures, only because that person has never had the experience of higher pleasure. If anyone adapts, in Mill's examples, it is the person who learns to appreciate the higher pleasures. For Mill, examples of people who are content with little do not illustrate that they have adapted, but they illustrate that they have not fully developed their desires. The QVE objection to SWB is thus more general. Consider, for instance, the example of the gamer discussed above. In the example, the gamer is both satisfied and needs not to have adapted aspirations. However, as I argued, on Mill's account there is still a difference in happiness between her life as a gamer and her later life as a person with a successful career. In brief, the adaptation problem illustrates a problem with the satisfied that have *decreased* their aspirations; the QVE objection illustrates a problem with the satisfied that have never *developed* their aspirations.

Just like the Epistemic Adaptation problem discussed in chapter 3, however, the QVE objection also shows an epistemic limitation of knowing how happy we really are.

9. Conclusion and discussion

In this chapter I have presented and assessed a perspective found in Mill's *Utilitarianism* that illustrates a problem for taking self-reported SWB as sufficient evidence for happiness, in particular, in cases that involve qualitatively different experiences. While the argument is inspired by Mill's qualitative view on hedonism, it is broadly compatible with a variety of plausible views on happiness. I have argued that the problem is based on plausible foundations. Out of the currently most prominent views on happiness, only on some Benthamite and life satisfaction views of happiness can the charge be avoided. However, given the charges of superficiality that have been raised against such views, we should wonder if happiness is still a prudentially interesting concept if we accept them.

The argument presented in this essay presents a problem for the measurement of happiness by means of SWB, in particular, in contexts involving happiness comparisons on the basis of SWB between qualitatively different experiences. Nevertheless, my aim in this paper is not to criticize the SWB project as a whole. Happiness is an important

feature of our lives—arguably the most important feature. It deserves to be treated in its full depth, but it also deserves to be studied. The QVE objection indicates a limit of SWB research. There are important ways in which the QVE objection can help SWB move forward. Firstly, there is a large variety of cases in which the rating of the enjoyment of experiences is not affected by the QVE objection. A straightforward example is the question of whether watching television or going to the cinema is more enjoyable to a certain group of people. The QVE objection does not seem to apply to the usage of SWB research for answering this question. In so far as watching television and going to the cinema are qualitatively different, the differences can be appreciated by those who have experienced both. The QVE objection thus helps to clarify which questions can and which questions cannot be answered by means of SWB methodology. By doing so, the QVE objection does not only indicate problems for SWB research, but also provides a stronger foundation for applications of SWB to which the QVE objection does not apply.

Another way in which the QVE may be helpful relates to the large number of puzzles and paradoxes that are characteristic of the SWB literature (e.g. Deaton and Stone 2013). Just like in the case of parenting discussed above, the QVE objection may help explain certain paradoxical results. Lastly, I hope the QVE will inspire new empirical ways to research happiness. Following Mill, people with a rich experiential basis could be an important source of knowledge about happiness. As Haybron's example of Glen illustrates, studying how people experience transitions between qualitatively different lives may be an important source of information about how happy different lives are. It may be that qualitatively different experiences should be addressed by means of different research methodologies. Happiness is a complex concept, and studying it will never be easy. However, awareness of the limitations of existing methods will ultimately bring the field of study forward.

Chapter 5: Can Welfare be Measured with a Utility-Index?

1. Introduction

Since the second half of the twentieth century welfare economics has been built upon the foundational assumption that welfare should be conceived of in terms of the satisfaction of preferences and that it is highly doubtful that preferences can result in a cardinal measures of welfare, or measures that are interpersonally comparable (Binmore 2009; Colander 2007). Lionel Robbins' (1932) plea for expelling measures of psychological feelings of satisfaction out of the science of economics is said to be pivotal in the formation of this view. Rather than conceiving of welfare in terms of pleasure, welfare should be conceived of in terms of whether people get what they want, but this concept of satisfaction of preferences is difficult to measure on an interpersonally comparable scale. Consequently, welfare cannot be measured in such a fashion. However, in recent years, the rise of happiness economics has shaken economics' attitude towards the measurement of welfare. Happiness economics has been growing expansively, but has also encountered much criticism (Barrotta 2008; Sugden 2008; Hausman 2010; Fleurbaey and Blanchet 2013; Stewart 2014).[41]

This paper is concerned with one particular response to the trend to measure welfare in terms of happiness, which has come from economists who endorse the view that welfare should be conceived of in terms of preferences rather than in terms of happiness or life-satisfaction, and do not believe that the latter are necessarily good proxies of the former. Namely, the response that rejects happiness measures because they do not (necessarily) cohere with people's preference-satisfaction, but that welfare can nevertheless be measured in practice by means of elucidating people's preferences, and measuring the extent of their satisfaction. The most prominent example of such

[41] It similarly has been fiercely defended against the charge that happiness measures are not cardinal (Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Frijters 2004), and that it does not capture what it is intended to capture (see for example Diener et al. 2009; Veenhoven 2012a; and Alexandrova and Haybron 2016 and chapter 3 for a critical appraisal).

criticism comes from Benjamin et al. (2014) who argue that: "widely-used SWB measures may not capture all factors that enter into preferences" (Benjamin et al. 2014, 2700). As a response, they are revising the age-old skepticism about the possibility to measure preference-satisfaction meaningfully on an individual level. Benjamin et al. formulate a general formal framework and related measurement methodology for measuring a preference-based wellbeing index, novel in its aim to measure welfare comprehensively.

The aim to provide preference-satisfactionist alternatives to happiness-based measures of wellbeing has also arisen in more applied contexts. In particular, in health economics, the need for welfare indicators for the valuation of interventions has led to a variety of methods to measure utility for health states. More recently, the need for more comprehensive measures has also led to the formulation of measures for the utility of quality of lives more generally. A prominent example is the ICEpop CAPability measure for Adults—or ICECAP-A (Al-Janabi, Flynn, and Coast 2012; Al-Janabi et al. 2013; Flynn et al. 2015). While both preference-based welfare measures have arisen in quite different contexts, both have motivated their approach in response to happiness-based measures, aim to measure welfare in general, and intend their approach to be able to inform policy. As the ICECAP-A uses the preference-approach to welfare pragmatically—as a proxy for people's valuation—and thus does not endorse the approach on substantive philosophical grounds, in this chapter, the approach is used to contrast with Benjamin et al.'s approach by offering an alternative set of methodological choices in a preference-based welfare measure.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the general success of this response; not, however, in terms of the plausibility of the underlying theory of wellbeing, but in terms of the success of the claim that preference-satisfactionism can feasibly be developed into individual indices of wellbeing. Before I analyze this at a general level of abstraction, I assess the empirical strategies of the mentioned approaches in detail in order to see how they deal with measuremental challenges. This discussion shows that the methodological dilemmas that are faced by these measures are very similar, even though the choices they make are different. Not only does this clarify the issues at hand in a concrete context, but also takes seriously the context of the development of concrete measures, in which theoretical problems may be tackled by pragmatic choices. Ultimately, however, I argue the pragmatic choices

they make come at a high cost. Regardless of the general skepticism on the basis of theoretical grounds, I argue feasibility constraints with respect to data-collection of individuals require economists to make steep methodological tradeoffs. A methodology that fully respects the theoretical commitments of a preference-based view on welfare that is also useful for policy would be so data-demanding that it would be infeasible.

Section 2 discusses the very idea of preference-measures of welfare, and the meaning of policy-relevance and theoretical commitments in this context, section 3 discusses the two case studies in detail, section 4 abstracts more general conclusions from this discussion with respect to the feasibility of measuring welfare through preferences. Section 5 concludes.

2. Measuring preference-based welfare, the very idea

The idea that welfare is constituted by preference-satisfaction comes with a number of commitments. As discussed in the introduction (chapter 1), preference-satisfaction theories are, different from hedonism, not mental-state accounts of welfare. While preferences are mental-states, the satisfaction of preference is not (Griffin 1986). Welfare, on a preference-satisfaction account represents the extent to which the world corresponds with how one wants it to be. Regardless of how strongly it influences a person's sense of happiness or satisfaction, whenever a preference is satisfied, welfare is, ceteris paribus, increased.

Preference-satisfaction theory is sometimes called a formal theory of welfare (Tiberius 2004), as it does not substantively take position on any specific good, but rather leaves individuals to be the author of what is good for them. An important underlying motivation for the formal nature of preference-satisfaction accounts is a strong anti-paternalistic intuition that the individual should be the ultimate judge on what makes her life good. A well-known formulation of this idea by Peter Railton is that: "it would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone's good to imagine that it may fail in any way to engage him" (Railton 1986; see also Yelle 2014; Fletcher 2013). By making wellbeing solely dependent on what we want, it is impossible that we judge someone to be well on the basis of things that they do not care about. This liberal conception of wellbeing is the core theoretical commitment of the approach.

On the concrete level of measurement, this implies two things. Firstly, the measure should be individualistic. That is, a preference-satisfaction measure of an individual's welfare should be based on her preferences, and not on the preferences or values of the group she is a part of, arm-chair philosophers, or policy-makers.[42] Secondly, the space of things people may have preferences over, should not be restricted. If it is the case that people have strong preferences over the success of their football team, such preferences should have a place in a general measure of welfare. These two concrete commitments that follow from the liberal commitments of preference-satisfactionism we can call **individualism** and **unrestrictedness** respectively.

So, what does it mean to measure welfare through preferences? The kind of things people have preferences over can be represented as a finite set of dimensions of welfare. To make this precise, consider the following general formalization of welfare:

$$W_i \equiv f_i(\mathbf{w}_i) \qquad (5.1)$$

Where W_i is an individual welfare function for individual i, $\mathbf{w}_i$ a vector of elements that constitute welfare for i, and f_i a function that describes how these combine into a welfare value. For example, hedonism can be characterized in this way, where f_i=f is a linear function, while $\mathbf{w}_i$=w is a vector of one element, namely pleasure,[43] while in case of objective list theories $\mathbf{w}_i$=$\mathbf{w}$, contains a number of elements that contribute to people's wellbeing in some way, f_i=f.[44] Preference-satisfaction can be represented in two equivalent ways. In a limited form, it can be expressed as a version of (5.1) in which w_i has one element, s_i: the extent to which one's preferences are satisfied, where f_i=f is a linear unindexed function. Equivalently, we can also say that $f_i(\mathbf{w}_i)$ is a completely individualized version in which both the contents of $\mathbf{w}_i$ as well as the way they are combined are fully determined by the structure of a person's preferences:

[42] More precisely, while some preference-based conceptions of welfare may exclude preferences on formal grounds (such as unstable desires, Chekola 2007), it could not do so on substantive grounds (such as seeming silly, like Rawls 1971's famous grass-counter)

[43] In case of qualitative hedonism, e contains a variety of versions of pleasure, in which case the relationship, between $\mathbf{w}_i$ and w_i is also more complex.

[44] The capability approach, merely limits $\mathbf{w}_i$ to functionings and capabilities, without specifying f_i, or $\mathbf{w}_i$ in any substantive sense (Sen 1985a)

$$W_{pi} \equiv fs_i = f_i(\mathbf{w}_i) \quad (6.2)$$

A measure of welfare is thus one that represents W_{pi} somehow. Such measures can differ in various ways, allowing for different types of comparisons. Most significantly, a measure of W_{pi} may be used to make comparisons between individuals, or within individuals over time. Because empirical work on the measurement of welfare aims to guide policy, it is useful to look at possible aims of wellbeing policy. Assuming that a policy maker is interested in the wellbeing of affected citizen when comparing two alternative policy actions to the status quo, a policy maker would be interested in total welfare effects, but also in where in the distribution the changes in welfare lie.

In the ideal case, measures of preference-satisfaction—which economists generally call utility—are cardinally interpretable and interpersonally interpretable (see table 5.1). If this is the case, a policy maker can evaluate the degree and equality of welfare in the current state, and the effect of policies on both. In a less ideal case, utility can be compared across individuals, but only provides ordinal information. In this case, the worst-off in society can be identified, but the magnitudes of changes for different individuals cannot be compared. However, it may also be the case that a measure is cardinal, but not interpersonally comparable. In these cases, its policy relevance depends on whether the *differences* can be meaningfully compared. If units of utility can be compared, but levels cannot, aggregated changes in welfare can be estimated, even though the distribution of welfare cannot be identified. This thus allows for utilitarian considerations in policy-making. For policy purposes, the worst situation is that utility measures are not interpersonally comparable, and the differences are only ordinally comparable, or cardinally comparable only within individuals (but not between). In both these cases, welfare indices would be able to indicate whether the welfare of individuals has increased or decreased, but not how welfare of different individuals compares, nor how the aggregate magnitude of such welfare changes compares to other welfare changes.

The relationship between the comparability levels of measures and policy evaluation is best illustrated with an example. Consider a policy maker who has the option between keeping the status quo or doing policy A that affects Erik and Sophie. There is a measure of utility that is 6 for Erik and 8 for Sophie. We know that doing A would increase Erik's utility

by 1, while it would decrease Sophie's utility by .5. In case the measure can be interpreted cardinally and is interpersonally comparable, we can see that the situation brings Erik and Sophie closer together, while improving aggregate welfare. In case, they are ordinal and interpersonally comparable, we can see that Erik is worst-off, but we have no idea how Sophie's decrease compares in magnitude to Erik's. In case the utility measure is cardinal but levels of welfare are incomparable (and changes are comparable), we can see that A improves overall welfare, though we do not know if it equalizes the distribution. In the worst case—an ordinal measure that is not interpersonally comparable (or a cardinal measure of which neither the differences nor levels are comparable)—we know A improves Erik's welfare and decreases Sophie's, but we cannot say how this changes the distribution of welfare, nor whether Erik's increase is larger or smaller than Sophie's decrease. The **cardinality** and **comparability** thus jointly make up the policy-relevance of utility measures of welfare.

Table 5.1: levels of measurement and comparability

	Cardinal	**Ordinal**
Interpersonal comparable	Ideal: both the welfare effects and its impact on inequality can be assessed.	No magnitudes, but we can identify the worst-off
Not interpersonal comparable	**If differences comparable:** utilitarian considerations **If differences not comparable:** Individual intertemporal judgments	Ordinal individual intertemporal judgments

A final consideration is **feasibility** of measures. Any measure of welfare, but particularly ones that are to be used to inform policy, should not be overly demanding on either respondents or government offices conducting them. In particular, in the discussion that follows, the term feasibility will be used to distinguish between welfare measures that use data that can be obtained through reasonably long questionnaires (or other informational bases) and cases that require so much information

from individuals that doing so would be prohibitively costly; in particular for the individual being evaluated.

3. In practice

Benjamin et al. (2014) motivate their article by describing "the principle of revealed preference" as the cornerstone of economics: "the ultimate criterion for judging what makes a person better off is what she chooses" (2014, 2698). However, while in some economic instances this principle may be informative, in particularly in the policy context, people do not actually make choices about options that may matter for their wellbeing. The aim of their paper is to provide an index of preferences to serve as an indicator of wellbeing in particularly these contexts. More precisely put, they want to develop: "an individual-level index that combines together different aspects of well-being that may be measured by survey questions" (2014, 2699)

They acknowledge and appreciate SWB measures as a candidate for this purpose. However, while such measures may be multi-dimensional, the weights attached to these dimensions are generally assigned by researchers themselves, and are thus "ad hoc" (2700). Consequently a person can score high on such indices without this reflecting this person's preference.

The article provides a theoretical framework as well as an empirical illustration of this framework, which makes a number of pragmatic choices. Theoretically, the proposal is based on the consumption theoretic framework in which changes in utility are assumed to be proportional to changes in consumed goods:

$$\Delta u \propto \sum_{m=1}^{M} p_m \Delta c_m \quad (5.3)$$

Where M is the set of goods, m, consumed at price p_m, and quantity c_m. While this framework may be sufficient for assessing the impact of market transactions on welfare, the same does not apply to non-market goods, which policy typically is engaged with. Thus, they propose to broaden the framework accordingly. Rather than just market goods, they propose a welfare function exists out of a set **w** of welfare components, w_j, over which people have preferences. Formally, this is captured by the following:

$$\Delta u = \sum_{j=1}^{J} \frac{\partial u(\boldsymbol{w})}{\partial w_j} \Delta w_j \quad (5.4)$$

Intuitively, this captures the idea that over a given time period, the changes in welfare are given by all the changes in welfare components multiplied by their impact on welfare, which corresponds to how strongly they are preferred. So, if only health improves, while all the other welfare components remain the same, welfare changes just as much as how strongly the health improvement was preferred over alternatives.

Interestingly, the theoretical framework does not stop here, but in fact, the welfare index that is proposed is defined as follows:[45]

$$W_{bhks,i} = \sum_{j=1}^{J} \frac{\partial u(\boldsymbol{w})}{\partial w_j} w_j \quad (5.5)$$

Compared to (5.4), the Δ is removed from before w_j. In practice then, an empirical strategy to get at the index is to measure the $\partial u(\boldsymbol{w})$ from a stated preference survey, while the w_j's should be obtained independently from, among other sources, SWB surveys. In the stated preference survey, respondents are asked to report what their preferences are between two options in which 1-3 aspects are altered positively, and 1-3 are altered negatively, and they are asked whether they prefer either one of the options slightly, somewhat, or much.

Benjamin et al. (2014) acknowledge that "[s]ince the marginal utilities are defined only up to an arbitrary constant, so is the index" (2014, 2704–5). As the index weighs the *level* of welfare components with their *marginal* relative utility, it can only sensibly compare changes in welfare within an individual over time. Even in the theoretical ideal that a full preference map can be made for a particular individual that maps the desirability of all the possible values of **w**, only "ordinal welfare comparisons could then be made between any of the individual's SWB-survey occasions" (2014, 2705). This indicates that even in the theoretical ideal, the index falls within the lower right corner of table 5.1, with a highly limited policy-applicability.

[45] To cohere with the rest of the formulations in this thesis the name of the index, $W_{bhks,i}$ is my own input, the rest comes directly from Benjamin et al. (2014, 2704)

However, in their proposed (and executed) empirical strategy, a number of pragmatic choices need to be made that complicate the validity of even such minimal intrapersonal ordinal comparisons.

Selection of aspects

The methodology Benjamin et al. propose to elucidate preferences is a stated preference method by which respondents are asked to make hypothetical choices between aspects in **w**. This requires that that the elements of **w** are specified. This puts Benjamin et al. for a challenge. After all, in order for the preference measure to be valid, it requires the set of aspects of welfare to be "*exhaustive*", as well as "*non-overlapping*" (2014, 2707). Nevertheless, because they would not want their "ex-ante beliefs" to be an influence, and because they would not want to miss out on any important aspects, they decide to create "as comprehensive a list of candidate fundamental aspects as we practically can" (2014, 2707). The constructed list is made up of philosophical lists (such as Nussbaum 2000) and aspects of wellbeing from both the empirical and philosophical literature, such as SWB constructs, as well as some aspects the authors themselves contributed. Benjamin et al. acknowledge that this may lead to overlapping aspects on the list. They propose a data-driven methodology to detect conceptual overlap (2014, appendix).

The resulting list contains 129 aspects, including, for example, "The extent to which humanity does things worthy of pride", "The amount of pleasure in your life", "Equality of income in your nation", "You not feeling anxious", and "People getting the rewards and punishments they deserve" (2715-2718). They acknowledge that many of these may overlap. The amount of pleasure in one's life and "you not feeling anxious" is one such example. In order to abridge this list into non-overlapping aspects of welfare, Benjamin et al. propose a data-driven strategy. They argue that when a combination of two aspects is considered less desirable to an individual than the sum of the two separate aspects, it implies an overlap, and one of the two aspects may have to be deleted from the list.

This methodological choice has an important theoretical attraction: it minimizes paternalism with respect to the contents of $\mathbf{w}_i$, and thereby maximizes unrestrictedness.[46] However, it comes with a

[46] The extent to which it minimizes paternalism is arguably still more restricted than necessary. It still excludes many possible aspects people may have preferences about, such as the status of the great barrier reef, that our children are successful in life, or having aesthetic experiences, just to name a few.

number of problems.[47] The overlap between many of the concepts involved may very well be detected by the method proposed, but not clearly solved. Consider for example the overlap between health and pleasure. Feeling pleasure, up to an extent, must surely be seen as part of being healthy, while at the same time being in bad health will affect how much pleasure one feels. The proposed method will thus quite likely find overlap between pleasure and health, but this certainly does not mean that these are fully separate aspects and that one of them should be dropped. Quite likely many items on the list will overlap in a similar fashion. A potential solution to avoids overlap is to rely on theoretically motivated lists, such as objective lists in philosophy (e.g. Griffin 1986; see also Alkire 2002). However, Benjamin et al. rightly argue that relying on such ex ante lists would hostile to the unrestrictedness commitment of preference-satisfactionism.

Data-demandingness and pooling of preferences

Another problem arises from the large number of elements in $\mathbf{w}$, namely, it now becomes effortful to map a person's preferences. This would not only require an individual to rank 129 aspects in life, but because no particular functional structure is assumed, the large possible set of all possible values of the elements in $\mathbf{w}_i$ may take have to be compared vis-à-vis each other as whole. This means that the number of required comparisons to construct a full preference map increases exponentially. The intuition behind this is that when one aspect, such as health, suddenly deteriorates, this may not only affect the relative importance of health improvements in comparison to other aspects, but it may also affect the preference someone has between other aspects, such as between *lack of anxiety* and *your sense of achievement*. Such a nonlinear relationship between preferences over these aspects vastly increases the possible preference-comparisons required to construct a full preference-

[47] A main problem is mentioned, but a further issue is that this methodology is blind to the distinction between conceptual overlap and overlap due to causal relationships. To a person who cares about income, education and income may overlap in terms of preferences (due to expected income increase education may provide), but need not think of the two as similar concepts. A second issue is that Benjamin et al. assume that people's interpretation of concepts is fixed. This is dubious and, in the context of developing conceptual overlap, problematic. A person who is asked to make a tradeoff between "The happiness of your family" and "The amount of pleasure in your life" will probably understand happiness to be something different than someone who is asked to make a tradeoff between "The happiness of your family" and "The overall well-being of you and your family". Moreover, the approach is highly data-demanding, adding to the concern discussed below.

map. This leads Benjamin et al. to a number of pragmatically motivated choices.

In order to overcome the data-demandingness of the proposed theoretical framework, Benjamin et al. assume that preferences are locally linear, thus assuming away the non-linear effect just described. Secondly, preferences are elicited only at the present level of values of **w**. This allows Benjamin et al. to limit themselves to asking respondents to make hypothetical tradeoffs at the present level of **w**. So, this means that they need not ask respondents how they would make the tradeoff between anxiety and sense of achievement *given that their health level is X*, where X may vary from very close to very far from their actual level of health. These assumptions, however, are highly restrictive. It excludes preferences that people plausibly may have. Nevertheless, even with these assumptions, deriving individual marginal utilities requires individuals to make large sets of comparisons in their proposed stated preference surveys.

A way Benjamin et al. overcome this difficulty is by pooling respondents. This means that the responses from the hypothetical tradeoffs are pooled together as if they all came from a single person. This heavily reduces the data-demandingness of the method, but such a method is equivalent to assuming a representative agent. As Benjamin et al. acknowledge, "[d]oing so is difficult to justify theoretically" (2014, 2731). After all, in light of the individualistic commitment of the preference-satisfactionist approach, it is peculiar to assume that all individuals have (roughly) the same preferences. Their proposed method to counter this concern is to identify different groups, or "types" according to their demographic characteristics.

The general problem this discussion raises is related to the first. Because the number of welfare aspects Benjamin et al. consider is so large, constructing preference maps is so data-demanding, which in turn requires simplifying assumptions that are difficult to justify in light of the individualist commitment of the approach. The weights used to aggregate the different welfare aspects in **w** may very well be very different from the weights that an individual would want. To see this, consider someone whose preferences deviate from typical responses from her type. For example, while everyone of her type cares a lot about their health and the wellbeing of their families, one person cares much more about a sense of achievement. Her aggregate welfare, W_i, will then be weighed by weights that do not at all resonate with her own

preferences. Notably, even without attempting to develop a cardinal or interpersonally comparable measure of welfare, Benjamin et al. run into steep tradeoffs between feasibility and theoretical commitments.

An alternative: ICECAP-A

Preference-based indicators have been widely used to evaluate outcomes in cost-benefit analyses, in particular health care. In health care health-related quality of life is generally evaluated with a well-known preference-based measure, the QALY. A QALY captures the utility of being in a particular health state[48]. Health states can be defined in a number of dimensions. For example, a prominent measure (EQ-5D) uses: mobility, self-care, usual activities, pain/discomfort, and anxiety/depression. Each of these is scaled from 1-5, such that 13551 means that a health state comprises little mobility and much depression, medium self-care, but no pain and full ability to do usual activities. Nevertheless, the distinction between health-related quality of life and quality of life itself is not always clear, as the impact of decreased health states may affect a broad spectrum of aspects of our lives (Al-Janabi, Flynn, and Coast 2012). In order to overcome such problems, a number of health economists have proposed measures of general welfare. One such measure is the ICECAP-A. While the measure uses a capability-based framework and as such works under the assumption that preferences should not themselves be seen as the relevant concept for the weighing of different components of welfare, preferences are assumed to be indicative for how strongly we value such aspects, and thus can serve as a proxy. Effectively, like Benjamin et al., it uses preferences to assign weights to different welfare components. [49] Like Benjamin et al.'s empirical proposal it pools the noted

[48] One way in which this can be done is asking respondents to make time-tradeoffs between health states (others are using standard gambles or visual analogue scales). Under the assumption that utility components of time and health states are separable, one may assess when a particular individual is indifferent between living for 10 years in a bad health state compared to living X years in a perfect health state. If the perfect health state is assigned the value 1, we know that x must be the value of QALY of living for a year in the bad health state.

[49] The remainder mainly considers the ICECAP-A measure as a preference-measure of welfare and identifies weaknesses of it as such. However, this is not the only way to understand this measure, and does not appear to be the way the developers themselves see the ICECAP-A. The authors instrumentally use preferences as a proxy of valuation. As a capability measure that uses population preferences a proxy of "having reason to value" (Sen 1999), many of the criticism may not apply. The ICECAP-A measure may very well be among the most defensible measures of welfare, both in terms of normative and empirical adequacy, if it is not seen as a preference-measure of welfare. The same arguments apply to a similar measure, the Adult Social Care Outcomes Toolkit (ASCOT; Forder and Caiels 2011). However, while this measure takes on a more explicit utility-

preferences (Flynn et al. 2015). While the aim of the ICECAP measure is to construct a capability-based welfare measure, and only uses preferences instrumentally, it effectively is similar in structure. Both assume the framework in (5.2), and use stated hypothetical preferences to estimate f(.). However, there are a number of significant differences in the way the difficulties described above are addressed.

First, rather than using a list that is as comprehensive as possible, the developers of ICECAP-A decide to focus on a carefully constructed concise list, of 5 capabilities of a similarly high level of abstraction: stability, attachment, autonomy, achievement, and enjoyment. This list is not (only) informed by the academic literature, but extracted from structured interviews and focus groups (Al-Janabi, Flynn, and Coast 2012). Secondly, Al-Janabi et al. (2015) assume that their welfare measure can be calibrated between 0 (having no capabilities whatsoever), and 1 (having full capability). These two assumptions are arguably quite strong. It is restrictive to limit the set of **w** over which agents have preferences relevant for wellbeing to 5 capabilities. Nevertheless, if wellbeing were five-dimensional, it is not implausible to say that perfect wellbeing is reached if all these five dimensions are at their maximal levels. Al-Janabi et al. use a discrete choice-based valuational experiment, using best-worst scaling, in order to elucidate preferences.[50] This method, in combination with the two assumptions above, allow for a cardinal measure of welfare (or, the value of welfare).[51] The measure ultimately presents a population level measure scaled from 0 to 1, in which each of the 5 capabilities affects wellbeing non-linearly.[52] So, by filling out a questionnaire asking a respondent its 5 levels of capability, researchers can assign a welfare-value to the respondent on the basis of the weights from a population-wide discrete-choice experiment.

based framework, it aims to measure "social outcome" or "care-related quality of life" rather than well-being more generally.

[50] The methodology is based on asking respondents to compare well-being states – combinations of different levels of the 5 dimensions of the ICECAP-A measure. The estimates used to scale each dimension are based on the conditional probability an a well-being state is considered best (or worst) given the attribute level of the dimension.

[51] The authors are not very clear on the exact interpretation of their measure. They ultimately present their weights as a "tariff" to be used in economic valuations. It clearly presents the value of well-being states to each individual. It is not clear however, whether the authors believe there to be a distinction between the value of a well-being state for an individual and a well-being state itself.

[52] For methodological reasons however, no interaction in well-being value between capabilities is accounted for.

The cardinal and interpersonally comparable nature of the measure of welfare fits in the top left concern of table 5.1, and as such has much policy-relevance. Not only does it allow identifying the worst-off in society in terms of this measure, but it also helps to identify the impact of different interventions, and it can help assess how welfare has developed over time. Moreover, if the estimated weights can be extrapolated to other contexts,[53] it does not require much data to estimate. However, while the measure only uses preferences as an estimate of individual valuation, as an individualistic measure of welfare, the policy-relevance comes at a high cost. The methodology takes the population seriously in the determination of the welfare function, both in terms of its contents—the formulation of the 5 capabilities that make up **w**—as well as its weights. However, because population values are used, it fails to meet the individualistic commitment inherent to preference-satisfactionism as an account of welfare. If someone has a different view than the rest of the population in terms of the weights and contents of the wellbeing measure, the welfare function may be alien to her, and it may be possible that she scores high on the measure, without her endorsing the values on which this is based.

4. Steep tradeoffs

We have identified a number of different dimensions on which preference-based welfare measure may differ:

1) Does it restrict the list over which one can have preferences?
2) Does it use individual or group preferences to weigh welfare aspects?
3) Does it result in an ordinal or cardinal measure?
4) Does it result in an interpersonally comparable or incomparable measure?
5) Does it require a lot of data from individuals who are being assessed?

In the discussion above, we saw that Benjamin et al.'s measure and the ICECAP-A make the following choices:

[53] The authors themselves see the estimates weights as having value nation-wide in the UK, but also believe that particular contexts may require different weights.

Table 5.2: tradeoffs in Benjamin et al. (2014) and the ICECAP-A

	Benjamin et al. (2014)	**ICEPCAP-A**
Unrestricted preferences?	Yes (or minimally restricted)	No
Individual or pooled preferences?	Pooled	Pooled
Ordinal or cardinal?	Ordinal	Cardinal
Comparable?	Incomparable	comparable
Data-demanding?	Relatively data-demanding	Not very data-demanding

While Benjamin et al. only minimally restrict preferences and aim at a measure that is ordinal and incomparable between individuals, and is relatively data-demanding, the ICECAP-A measure restricts the objects over which individuals have preferences to 5 capabilities, gets a cardinally and interpersonally comparable measure of welfare, which is not very data-demanding of individuals. However, both use group-level preferences, even though both submit that their methods can be used for substrata of the population, rather than the population as a whole, to get closer to the individual level.

The first two considerations on the list relate to the theoretical commitments of the approach. While neither approach truly provides a welfare measure that respects individual preference, Benjamin et al. do go at great lengths to leave the aspects over which individuals can have preferences as open as possible, while the ICECAP-A only captures preferences over five abstract capabilities.

The second two questions determine how useful the measure ultimately is for policy-makers. While the ICECAP-A is (plausibly) taken by its developers to represent a cardinal and interpersonally comparable measure of welfare, Benjamin et al.'s measure only captures ordinal changes in welfare that are not interpersonally comparable. While Benjamin et al. explicitly have a policy-context in mind when they consider the application of their measure, it is unclear how their measure can be helpful in guiding welfare-driven policies. Because of the limited comparability, it is neither able to make utilitarian judgments about the changes in aggregate welfare, nor is it able to identify relevant differences in welfare between individuals. At best, it is able to identify areas where Pareto-improvements are possible.

Lastly, the final question is ultimately about feasibility. As Benjamin et al. note, even under restrictive assumptions, fully comparing

the different possible combinations of 129 welfare aspects leads to such a large number of comparisons that this would be completely infeasible to do for each individual, and, despite the much lower number of welfare aspects in the ICECAP-A, the same applies. But, in light of the pragmatic choice to group preferences, the ICECAP-A strongly limits the data-demandingness, and Benjamin et al. to a more limited extent.

While feasibility, policy-relevance and theoretical faithfulness are all attractive features of a measure, the development of both measures of welfare shows that in both cases these commitments cannot be met at the same time. An ideal measure of welfare does not limit the amount of welfare aspects (while, of course, avoiding conceptual overlap). But, welfare may very well be made up out of a very large number of aspects for certain individuals. Preferences that impact my welfare may include the color of my hair, as well as how sunny the days are where I live. Creating a full index of preference-satisfaction requires understanding how every possible configuration of **w** compares in terms of desirability to all other configurations of **w**. Ideally, a measure of welfare is not only comprehensive, but also cardinal and interpersonally comparable. It is highly contentious whether such a measure could validly exist in practice (e.g. Hausman 1995; List 2003; cf. Binmore 2009), but if so, a calibrated scale would be needed to standardize the preference ranking (as the ICECAP-A does). However, this requires that we do not only evaluate changes of welfare at the present level of **w**, but that we construct a full preference-map that will help us indicate how far away we are from calibrated points (e.g. 0 and 1). This again, raises the number of hypothetical choices a particular individual would make further. Making a preference-measure of welfare more attractive theoretically or in terms of policy-relevance thus comes with a major cost in terms of data-demandingness. This is explicitly acknowledged by both groups of authors when it comes to the question whether a measure should use individual or population-level preferences. Benjamin et al. motivate their choice to use group-preferences rather than individual level preferences explicitly by referring to avoiding data-overdemandingness, and Flynn et al. (2015) also note that even with 5 welfare dimensions, it was infeasible for each individual to make 1024 discrete choices between all 1024 scenarios that 5 dimensions allow for. In both cases the measure can be

individualized, but only at the cost of being over-demanding to individuals who are being assessed.[54]

While at this point it may seem as if this is simply a contingent feature of the current methodology to measure preferences, there is a necessary component to the problem at hand. There are simply a lot of dimensions on which lives may be different that can be relevant for welfare, and this means that there are a lot of different possible combinations of such dimensions that make up welfare on a preference-satisfaction account. For every dimension added to the set of $\mathbf{w}_i$, and for every unit on which these dimensions may vary, the number of possible welfare states increases exponentially. The ICECAP-A is based on 5 dimensions that may vary over 4 different levels. This leads to 1024 possible values of $\mathbf{w}_i$ that should be ranked in order to get at a full preference-map. In case of Benjamin et al., if we assume that each of the 129 dimensions can vary over 4 different levels, we get at a total of $4.63*10^{77}$ possible states of the world to compare. If we take seriously the idea that preferences are personal, we have to take seriously the idea that all these different possible combinations of welfare aspects can be valued differently by different individuals. A method that remains faithful to this idea simply requires a lot of information on how people make hypothetical tradeoffs between different possible combinations of welfare components.

Hence, as infeasibility is the hardest constraint for researchers wanting to provide a helpful measure for policy purposes, a tradeoff needs to be made between theoretical faithfulness and applicability. Without suggesting a correct way to make such tradeoffs, it should be clear that such tradeoffs come at a high cost to its theoretical commitmets. Neither of the two measures ultimately stays faithful to the individualism of preference-satisfactionism. Furthermore, Benjamin et al.'s measure falls short of providing a policy-relevant measure, while the ICECAP-A heavily restricts the space of valuation.

[54] Similarly, developers of the ASCOT (ft. 49) write: "There are practical limits on the number of indicators any preference-based measure can utilize, mainly due to the limitations of preference elicitation techniques. They include the difficulty respondents have in ranking over many different attributes and the tractability of statistical analysis of these data." (Forder and Caiels 2011, 1768)

5. Conclusion

For theoretical reasons, the possibility that welfare could be measured by means of an index of preference-satisfaction has for a long time been perceived with a skeptical attitude. Such attitude may have been overly skeptical. The theoretical frameworks of both reviewed approaches show that at a concrete level plausible pragmatic choices can be made that result in indices of utility. However, in light of methodological considerations, a preference measure of welfare falls short either in terms of normative and theoretical commitments, in terms of policy-relevance, or faces the charge that it is overly data-demanding to be put into practice.

So, to what extent can welfare be measured with a utility-index? While a preference-based method of indexing welfare connects closely to economic theory, the tradeoffs identified in this chapter pose a stark challenge to this possibility. However, the tradeoffs also offer an opportunity to bring different approach to welfare measurement closer together. For example, by restricting the space of possible preferences in a welfare-measure, the developers of the ICECAP have incorporated insights from the capability approach. While this may make their approach less attractive to a pure preference-satisfactionist, it should make the approach more appealing to capability scholars. If indeed, a preference-measure needs to let go of its unrestrictedness, the usage of insights from alternative approaches—such as the capability approach and objective list theories—may be a way to build a synthesis in the ongoing debate on how to measure welfare.

Chapter 6: A Capability Measure of Wellbeing: Can it Exist?

> The Scylla of empirical overambitiousness threatens us as much as the Charybdis of misdirected theory
> - Sen, *Commodities and Capabilities*, p.32

I. Introduction

One important aim of the capability approach has been to formulate alternative operationalizations—or measures—of wellbeing for empirical purposes. The question whether the capability approach can be operationalized in practice has already received much attention within capability scholarship (Comim 2005; Robeyns 2006). Reasons for skepticism about the operationalizability of the capability approach to wellbeing are that the identification of the valuable functionings and capabilities is difficult (Robeyns 2003, 2005; Alkire 2007), and that capabilities and capability sets are unobservable and may be difficult to identify and disentangle (Basu 1987; Krishnakumar and Ballon 2008). I argue that there is an alternative problem that has more severe consequences for the possibility of wellbeing measurement by means of the capability approach in particular. The problem is, roughly, that the conception of individual human good as composed of functionings and capabilities[55] that constitute each person's wellbeing differently is practically incompatible with the skeptical attitude towards personal assessment of wellbeing within the capability approach. I argue that both features are central to the approach. While this may not pose a problem to the capability approach as a framework for conceptualizing and theorizing about justice, freedom, poverty or advantage, or even as a framework to theorize about wellbeing, it does pose a significant problem for the approach as a framework for developing a feasible operationalization of wellbeing in the social sciences.

[55] In Sen's initial (1985a) – and to date most precise – statement of the relationship between functionings, capabilities and wellbeing, wellbeing (achievement) is initially formalized to consist only of functionings. However, he later states that capabilities may have wellbeing value as well. As such, I follow Sen in the remainder of the chapter by supposing that wellbeing consists in both functionings and capabilities.

Amartya Sen originally motivated the approach in response to the shortcomings of existing approaches to measuring wellbeing, in particular desire-satisfaction and happiness-based interpretations of utility in economics. In recent years, these approaches have gained an increasing amount of attention (see chapter 3-5). In response to these developments, numerous criticisms have been written by capability scholars (e.g. Sen 2008, 2009; Nussbaum 2008; Stewart 2014), and the capability approach is generally suggested as an alternative.

This raises the question to what extent the capability approach is able to provide a feasible alternative measure of wellbeing. A number of proposals and attempts have been made to construct measures of wellbeing within the capability framework (Cookson 2005; Schokkaert 2007; Anand et al. 2009; Van Ootegem and Spillemaeckers 2010; Anand, Krishnakumar, and Tran 2011). In this chapter I assess whether these proposals succeed, and more generally, whether the capability approach can be used to develop wellbeing measures. While my assessment of this issue is negative, the project also has a more constructive aim, namely, to clarify some limits of wellbeing measurement that may contribute to the development of wellbeing measures in the future.

2. Wellbeing Measurement, Adaptation, and Wellbeing Pluralism.

Consider the following three claims about the capability approach:

1) **Wellbeing measurement**: Wellbeing can, and should be, conceptualized and measured in terms of functionings and capabilities.
2) **Rejection of Subjectivism**: Wellbeing should not be conceptualized and measured in terms of self-reported preferences or subjective wellbeing.
3) **Wellbeing pluralism**: Different functionings and capabilities contribute differently to the wellbeing of different people.

As I defend below, these claims are all generally considered to be correct within the capability approach scholarship. Nevertheless, they lead to a clear tension. It is not feasible to have a measure of wellbeing (claim 1) that does not rely on subjective judgments of wellbeing (satisfying claim 2), and at the same time respects that different functionings and

capabilities have varying degrees of importance to different people (claim 3). The statements are not strictly speaking analytically incompatible, but I will argue that, in any realistic sense, they cannot be jointly held at the same time. In section 3 below I will present this argument more elaborately. But before I do so, I present some arguments for the claim that 1-3 are indeed part of the common core of the capability approach. Furthermore, in section 4 I discuss how this tension applies to capability measures of wellbeing in practice. Section 5 considers some objections, and section 6 concludes with a discussion of how the tension should be resolved.

a) Wellbeing measurement

The first claim is most trivial at first sight. Almost all introductions to the capability approach cite the conceptualization and measurement of wellbeing (or quality of life) as one of the main motivations and applications of the approach. Ingrid Robeyns, for example, writes:

> "The core claim of the capability approach is that assessments of the wellbeing or quality of life of a person, and judgements about equality or justice, or the level of development of a community or country, should not primarily focus on resources, or on people's mental states, but on the effective opportunities that people have to lead the lives they have reason to value." (Robeyns 2006, 351; similar statements can be found in Nussbaum 2011).[56]

What is less trivial is what exactly counts as wellbeing assessment. Firstly, it must be noted that wellbeing measurement within the capability approach is sometimes broadly understood, as to include the measurement of poverty, advantage or development. The standard usage of wellbeing in philosophy is that the term wellbeing describes what makes life go well for the person living it. Being poor is an indication that life is not going well, but is clearly a different, narrower, concept than wellbeing itself. In his original formulation, Sen is primarily concerned with the more specific, broader notion of wellbeing, which comprises the answer to the question: "how 'well' is his or her being?" (Sen 1985a, 3)

[56] Nussbaum writes: "The capability approach can be defined as an approach to comparative quality-of-life assessment and to theorizing about basic social justice" (2011, 18).

Even on this specific notion, the capability approach distinguishes between a variety of wellbeing concepts that all play an important role in the evaluation of a person's situation (Sen 1985a). Firstly, the values people have generally are not only self-regarding, but may be other regarding too. Wellbeing only refers to those values, or goods, that contribute to the person's life itself, but agency refers to the values a person holds in general, including those regarding other people. Furthermore, in specifying these concepts, we may both be interested in their achievement—which values are actually achieved—as well as freedom that a person has to achieve these values. The terms wellbeing achievement, wellbeing freedom, agency achievement and agency freedom all play an important role in the capability approach. However, while the capability approach considers all these aspects to be important, our focus will be on wellbeing achievement. This is not to say that capabilities, which represent the freedom space of valuable achievements, do not play a role. Capabilities themselves can be a central part of what makes a life go well too. The opportunity to choose may be considered as important to a person's wellbeing, as well as valuable in its own right. In the former sense, capabilities may be considered part of the relevant vector of considerations making up wellbeing achievement (Sen 1985a, 44).

While it is trivial that the capability approach aims to provide a framework for measuring wellbeing, there are many different possible interpretations of what measurement entails. It may be objected that the measurement the capability approach seeks to guide is something quite different from what alternative approaches aim to do. In order to clarify how these different aims compare, consider the different levels of measurement that measurement theory typically distinguishes: nominal—not allowing for comparisons—, ordinal—allowing for comparisons of rank—, interval—allowing affine transformations—and ratio—allowing for ratio transformations. While some authors in the literature on wellbeing in economics have made the claim that wellbeing can be measured at an interval scale (Van Praag 2007; Blanchflower and Oswald 2004; see Kristoffersen 2010), other conceptualizations of wellbeing are more modest and aim at ordinal measurement (Benjamin et al. 2014). The objective Scandinavian approach to wellbeing measurement is more careful still. In an introduction to the approach, Robert Erikson and Hannu Uusitalo write:

> "There is no yardstick that allows for a combination of the components into a single measure of welfare. There is no objective or impartial way to decide whether, say, a man with more severe working conditions but better economic resources than another man is better off, equal to, or worse off in welfare. Each man must decide who is better and who is worse off according to his own values." (1986, 187–88).

Such an approach thus provides a nominal measure of wellbeing. It describes different welfare states, without ordering them. For this reason, the approach is severely limited in the information it can provide about wellbeing. Without any yardstick, we cannot say whether a person's life has improved over time, nor can we make interpersonal comparisons of welfare. The ideas within the Scandinavian approach share many characteristics with the capability approach (Robeyns 2006), but the capability approach is more ambitious in this respect. While Sen (1985a) acknowledges that very often comparisons cannot be made precisely, it is also often true that rough comparisons can be made. Sen speaks in such an instance of an incomplete ordering,[57] which allow for clear comparisons when differences between capability sets are large, or one dominates the other, but do not result in a clear ordering otherwise. Sen's position on how welfare can be measured is thus half-way between ordinal and nominal measurement. Whenever comparisons can be made, the comparisons are ordinal, whenever they are not the measurement of welfare is merely nominal.

It is easy to see that a nominal measurement of welfare is deeply unsatisfactory. It reduces welfare measurement to a mere reporting of states that are relevant to welfare, without facilitating any sort of comparison. What we want from a measure of welfare for the purpose of scientific practice is the possibility of arriving at some ordinal rankings. Would it turn out that no (non-trivial) ordinal comparisons could be made with such a measure, we cannot say that the capability approach is able to provide an interesting welfare measure. Given the widespread views within the capability approach that it is a helpful and useful way to conceptualize and measure wellbeing within the social sciences, it seems

[57] More elaborately, Sen describes this as follows: "The "natural" form of wellbeing ranking is indeed that of a partial, incomplete order. It would be just as extraordinary if every possible pair of functioning vectors could be compared in terms of over-all wellbeing, as it would be if none of them could be. There will, of course, be many agreed valuations, and many decisive judgments, and the clarity of these cases is not compromised by the muddiness of other."(Sen 1985b, 198)

that most capability scholars do believe, with Sen, that interesting ordinal comparisons of welfare can be made on the basis of measures of functionings and capabilities, at least in certain instances.

b) rejection of subjectivity

The second claim finds its basis in one of the main motivations of the capability approach: the criticism of utility approaches of welfare—including conceptions based on happiness, life-satisfaction and desire-satisfaction (Sen 1985a, 1987, 2008, 2009, Nussbaum 2000, 2003, 2008, 2011; see D. A. Clark 2009; Qizilbash 2006a, see chapter 3). The main argument for this rejection is the adaptation argument, which is central in motivations of the capability approach. The problem of adaptation is that happiness and desire-based measures are both heavily dependent on people's attitudes, ambitions and desires, which at the same time are malleable. A deeply deprived person may succeed in leveling down her ambitions and desires in order to achieve a sense of happiness or satisfaction. Focusing merely on reported happiness and satisfaction will make it difficult to distinguish between those that are reportedly happy and well, and those that report high levels of happiness and satisfaction despite deprivations, while there is an important welfare difference between the two according those who employ the argument.

Different capability scholars derive different conclusions from the adaptation problem with respect to the usage of self-evaluations to measure wellbeing. To name a few: Francis Stewart, in a paper called *Against Happiness*, cites the adaptation argument in order to substantiate her claim that subjective wellbeing is a bad measure of progress. While such measures can be used to supplement objective measures in her view, it does show that they are not very reliable. Sabina Alkire describes the possibility to use individual valuation or life evaluation as a basis for the identification of valuable functionings, but adds that: "it sidelines practical reason and people's own aspirations, and studies them as objects." (2007, 14). Sen, similarly, has stressed that despite the adaptation problem desires and happiness could at most be used as evidence of a person's values, not as a direct measure itself: "[h]appiness may be linked to success, but the metric of happiness need not be a particularly good guide to the force and extent of our valuations in general" (2008, 27). The rejection of happiness or life-satisfaction measures of wellbeing due to the malleability and adaptivity of desires

and mental states is quite ubiquitous among authors within the capability tradition (see also Robeyns and van der Veen 2007; Nussbaum 2008; Alkire and Deneulin 2009).

An important point of contention is whether subjective information should not be used to index wellbeing at all. Sen remains mildly optimistic that wellbeing could be measured by measuring people's values rather than desires or happiness, but notes: "The problem, however, is made a good deal more complicated by the fact that questions of valuation are often hard to pose, and harder to answer, and also by the fact that the need for cool and non-mechanical reflection on these issues is not easy to fulfil." (1985a, 32). Martha Nussbaum, among others, has criticized Sen for leaving the option of personal valuation open—albeit only with a heavily qualified enthusiasm. The same arguments Sen uses against the desire-satisfaction and happiness approach also appear to apply to values:

> "Just as people can be taught not to want or miss the things their culture has taught them they should not or could not have, so too they can be taught not to value certain functionings as constituents of their good living, where their culture has an interest in, or cannot avoid, denying them access to these functionings" (1988, 39; see D. A. Clark 2009 for a similar argument).

Nussbaum continues in arguing that values may even be *more* malleable than desires, as they do not have the same biological basis as some desires do.

In more recent formulations of the adaptation problem, Sen formulates the problem of subjective measures more generally, not restricting them to happiness or desire. In the *Idea of Justice*, he concludes from adaptation examples that "our perceptions may tend to blind us to the deprivations that we do actually have, which a clearer and more informed understanding can bring out" (2009, 284).

While Nussbaum and Sen may disagree on whether there is a relevant distinction between the subjective measurement of happiness, desires or values, both present important arguments to reject the conceptualization and measurement of wellbeing solely in terms of subjective evaluations or preferences.

c) Wellbeing pluralism

Both pluralism and diversity play an important role within the capability approach in a variety of places (see Qizilbash 1997 for a discussion on the varieties of pluralism about well-being). Firstly, the capability approach is pluralistic about values in general and prudential value in particular. Human good cannot be reduced to a single entity such as happiness or desire-satisfaction, but, wellbeing is constituted by a variety of aspects. Similarly, there is not one type of life that is good for people, but there may be a variety of kinds of life that are good for people. Another sense in which human diversity plays an important role within the capability approach is within the concept of conversion factors. Given the same amount of resources different individuals may achieve more functionings or capabilities than others. A disabled person may require a wheelchair to get around, while shoes suffice for others. But there is one further form of diversity, namely the one central in claim 3: not only is the nature of wellbeing pluralistic, but these different goods may also contribute differently to the wellbeing of different individuals. In a recent article defining the capability approach Ingrid Robeyns writes:

> "The importance attached to human diversity is also shown by the fact that capabilities are plural—different people will need a different combination of the corresponding functionings in order to have the same levels of wellbeing." (Robeyns 2016, 11)

We may call the view that the value of specific functionings and capabilities is person-dependent *pluralism about prudential value—or, simpler, wellbeing pluralism*. It is important to note that the view excludes a completely objective notion of wellbeing, in which the aspects that make up wellbeing are both exactly the same for everyone, but also their relative importance to wellbeing is the same for everyone. Robeyns is right in asserting that this is a central feature within the capability approach. This is reflected in Sen's (1985a) original formulation, in which personal good, v_i is defined as:[58]

$$v_i = v_i(b_i) \tag{6.1}$$

[58] This is an amalgamation of two functions defined by Sen (1985a): $v_i = v_i\left(f_i(c(x_i))\right)$ (2.3) and $b_i = f_i(c(x_i))$ (2.1), where c(.) is the function converting a commodity vector into a vector of commodity characteristics, f(.) a utilization function, and x_i a vector of commodities owned by i.

where b_i is a vector of functionings and capabilities. What is important to note is that the function connecting the personal good and functionings is personalized. It thus exactly captures wellbeing pluralism: not all functionings and capabilities are equally important to everyone. In a later chapter Sen argues against the view that inter-personal comparisons would require a universal identification of the wellbeing function: "Indeed, the subscript i in $v_i(.)$ is referring precisely to the authorship of the valuational statement" (Sen 1985a, 37). This clearly supports Robeyns claim that this feature is essential to the approach.

Several objections can be made against the claim that wellbeing pluralism is essential to the capability approach. Firstly, Martha Nussbaum has defended a list of capabilities which she has argued to be necessary for a "truly human life", or a human life in dignity. In her view these capabilities are not person-relative, but shared by all human beings (see also Qizilbash 1998). However, Nussbaum writings dismiss the view that her list describes the human good independently of a person's individual or cultural identity. She stresses that it is not the intention of her approach to provide a full description of the human good, but to provide a minimal description within a theory of political entitlements. She acknowledges that political liberalism within the approach should leave open a variety of possible lives that can be considered good for people. Moreover, she believes that her account can, and should, be able to endorse the diversity of cultural values by describing the capabilities on the list as generally as "vague" as possible (Nussbaum 1988, 2011; see Qizilbash 1996).

Another possible argument against the view that this type of pluralism is inherent in the capability approach is the fact that Sen's explicit acknowledgment of personal differences in the valuation of functionings and capabilities has also explicitly *not* excluded the possibility that an objective standard could be applied within the capability framework. For example, in the Dewey lectures Sen describes Nussbaum's suggestion to move to a single list of functionings that constitute a good human life: "That view would not be inconsistent with the capability approach presented here, but not, by any means, required by it." (Sen 1993, 47). Hence, it appears that Sen, without rejecting it, also does not require wellbeing pluralism. However, at the same time, Sen endorses arguments for the view that there is diversity in the things that individuals have reason to value (Qizilbash 2013). For example, in

Inequality Re-examined (1992) he explicitly endorses Rawls' claim that there is diversity in conceptions of the good life that determine a person's ends. Moreover, throughout his work, Sen has focused on individual values that make up a person's good. That these are diverse in Sen's view can be read of his discussion in Commodities and Capabilities in which he discusses the need for individuating measures of wellbeing: "the question of the identification of functionings has to be supplemented by their own evaluation" (1985a, 31–32).

The discussions about what is the core of the capability approach and what is not is in full flux, and it is not easy to substantiate claims about this. However, it should be clear these three claims—beside all being plausible in themselves—are widely shared among capability scholars.

3. Measuring Wellbeing?

As the epigraph illustrates, the capability approach does not maintain that measuring important concepts such as wellbeing is meant to be easy. The three claims that I have defended as central to the approach pose a clear challenge: on the one hand, wellbeing is somehow individualistic. Because of human diversity, friendship, for example, may be more important to your wellbeing than it is to mine. On the other hand, measures of wellbeing cannot be too individualistic. At least, direct questions about happiness, life-satisfaction or desires cannot be taken as a direct indication for wellbeing. So, how do we identify the difference in value between different functionings/capabilities making up wellbeing achievement for different people without relying on individual reports on wellbeing in some form? A little more formally, we can illustrate the challenge as follows. If we would like to get to some measure of wellbeing, we would estimate Sen's formalization as follows:

$$w_i = w_i(a_i) \tag{6.2}$$

Where w_i is a wellbeing measure that is to be estimated, a_i a vector of estimates of functioning and capability scores, and $w_i(.)$ a function linking these estimates to our wellbeing measure. Given the view on measurement discussed above, the relationship between the measure and wellbeing itself can then be seen as follows:

$$v_i = w_i(a_i) + u \tag{6.3}$$

where u is an error term, capturing the incompleteness of the measure.[59] What is important to notice, is that because v_i is individually indexed, so is w_i. The weights in the function that links different individual (measures of) functionings and capabilities to wellbeing is thus person-dependent. The difficulty thus lies with estimating $w_i(.)$, which is a personalized function, without using a personal evaluation.

First of all, note that this problem is different from the identification of relevant functionings. We have taken the list of components of wellbeing, b_i, as given. Even if we could agree on, for example, Qizilbash's (1998) list of valuable functionings, then we have not yet accounted for how these functiontings contribute differently to different people's lives. The same applies to the problem that some categories of functionings and capabilities may overlap, or may be so interconnected that they cannot be disentangled. None of these problems determine the difficulty of this challenge, and for the present purpose, we may even assume them resolved.

The difficulty is that a priori assumptions could not really be used to identify $w_i(.)$. A personalized function, must somehow be based on specific information about the individual. There are two possible types of information on which the function can be identified. The most straightforward method would be to rely on subjective information about individual values. It seems almost impossible to imagine how $w_i(.)$ could be individually specified without employing an individual evaluation of life satisfaction, happiness, or wellbeing. However, this is exactly what subjective skepticism is meant to exclude. An alternative is to use information about individual values that are not based on information provided by the same individual. This is rare in the empirical literature, and, as I will argue, for good reasons.

If these observations are correct—there is indeed no possible alternative to personalizing a welfare measure besides relying on self-reported preferences or subjective wellbeing that is also sufficiently plausible and feasible—we can see how the tension between the three

[59] Because of u, v_i will be an estimate with bounds. When another set falls within these bounds, a comparison cannot be made clearly, while if it falls within outside, we can compare.

claims made within the capability approach so far leads to a strict impossibility:

> 1) **Wellbeing measurement**: Wellbeing can, and should be, conceptualized and measured in terms of functionings and capabilities.
> 2) **Rejection of Subjectivism**: Wellbeing should not be conceptualized and measured in terms of self-reported preferences or subjective wellbeing.
> 3) **Wellbeing pluralism**: Different functionings and capabilities contribute differently to the wellbeing of different people.
> 4) **Necessity of Subjectivism for wellbeing pluralism**: There is no alternative to identifying how different functionings and capabilities contribute differently to wellbeing of different people besides relying on self-reported preferences or subjective wellbeing that is sufficiently feasible and plausible.

These statements are jointly not compatible. If we accept the argument presented in this section (4), and accept that the capability approach indeed aims to measure wellbeing (1), as it explicitly states, either (2) or (3) must be rejected. The main tension, is thus this: without relying on subjective judgments of wellbeing or its close associates, a wellbeing measure cannot take interpersonal differences into account in the contribution of different functionings and capabilities to wellbeing.

4. Lopped-off Legs and Compromise

There are a number of capability researchers who have developed wellbeing measures. Sabina Alkire (2007) describes a number of approaches to arrive at a list that are open to the capability scholar: normative assumptions, using existing data pragmatically, using public consensus, participatory methods, or to use individual data on what people value in their lives. While the use of existing data does not provide a methodology for valuating at all, in particular the latter has been put to work to operationalize the capability approach to wellbeing. In discussing this work and alternative possibilities discussed by Alkire in light of the three claims, the tension between these claims becomes clear in empirical practice.

The most straightforward way to estimate $w_i(.)$ is to use an alternative proxy of wellbeing, v_i. The most prominent example of an empirical attempt to measure wellbeing using the capability approach—Paul Anand et al.'s paper *The Development of Capability Indicators* (2009)—has solved the identification problem this way. The relevance of separate capabilities on Nussbaum's list is evaluated by means of assessing their contribution to a life satisfaction question. This contribution is both important as well as controversial. While the paper presents a unique first operationalization of wellbeing based on capabilities, it uses a subjective wellbeing indicator to do so. Due to a lack of data, the paper is unable to individualize the wellbeing value of separate capabilities. In a follow-up paper (Anand, Krishnakumar, and Tran 2011), the authors are able to allow for heterogeneity in the relationship between different capabilities and life satisfaction, opening the door for individualizing their capability measure of wellbeing.

This approach has been heavily criticized by other capability scholars for neglecting the central focus within the capability approach of going beyond single subjective measures of wellbeing, which play a crucial role in Anand et al's approach (Robeyns 2011; Richardson 2015). For example, in reference to Anand et al.'s work, Henry Richardson suggests that "Nussbaum's central capabilities fit nicely in the welfarist's Procrustean bed, as long as one does not worry about the limbs that have been lopped off." (2015, 167). While this may be strong, it is easy to see how a capability scholar may object to the way in which the capabilities are valued by their relationship to subjective wellbeing. Moving away from using subjective valuation as a measure of wellbeing is one of the key motivations of the approach. Richardson continues by questioning whether capabilities are sought with the purpose of increasing life satisfaction, or whether life satisfaction is simply one valuable outcome. Anand et al. acknowledge some of these problems and argue that it may be that the relationship between capabilities and wellbeing, and capability and the happiness measures that are used may be different. However, in a later paper, such qualifications disappear when Anand cites this result as an example refuting "early concerns about the impossibility of measuring potential concepts such as 'opportunity'" (Anand, Durand, and Heckman 2011, 852–53).

Another area of research in which the operationalizations of wellbeing have been formulated using the capability framework is the context of health economics (Cookson 2005; Al-Janabi, Flynn, and Coast

2012; Flynn et al. 2015, see chapter 5). In this literature it is acknowledged that while desires and choices do not constitute wellbeing, population preferences are the best available evidence we have for what is a valuable capability. Nevertheless, aware of the seemingly tension, Flynn et al. refer to the solution as the "Cookson's compromise" (259).

A commonly made suggestion within the capability literature is that democratic deliberation should be a key resource in filling out the blanks of the approach. Sabine Alkire (2002), for example, argues that in the context of development and poverty alleviation projects, the capability approach can be put to work through participatory studies to identify the people's agency values. However, as far as I am aware, for the case of wellbeing values, this has not been put to use. Alkire (2007) distinguishes between global consensus methodology and small participatory methods. Both are problematic in light of the three claims discussed above.

Firstly, the reason a consensus methodology is widely endorsed if based on rational deliberation between different viewpoints, is that it is likely that irrelevant desires and values, such as those driven by adaptation, will not make it on such a list.[60] However, this method can only identify a list of abstract and global goods. It would not be possible to identify individual differences in what makes for a good life. While such methodology would use people's view on wellbeing, in terms of individual diversity, the approach stands at par with the usage of a priori assumptions about wellbeing. A consensus view, or a list of goods that applies to all, can simply not be used to identify differences in the importance of ingredients of wellbeing among different individuals.

The same reasoning does not strictly speaking apply to the usage of small scale studies to identify the functionings and capabilities constitutive of individual wellbeing (e.g. Van Ootegem and Spillemaeckers 2010). In fact, the usage of small scale participatory studies may be the most promising way of developing a wellbeing measurement able to accommodate all three central claims. For example, you could imagine that it would be possible to use community input on the valuation of capabilities for separate individuals. By relying on information provided by family members, friends or other people close

[60] This is a common view among capability scholars. David Clark, for example, argues: "In so far as value judgments are informed by intercultural exchanges and 'improved' through public reasoning, we can expect them to be more reliable (and less susceptible to adaptation)." (2009, 26)

to someone being evaluated, individual weights of different functionings and capabilities could be identified. While this results in individualized weights, it at the same time has potential to overcome the adaptation problem leading to skepticism about individual valuation in the capability approach. We could imagine that a caring mother may notice that her daughter who has adapted to work in a dirty factory is not doing very well, even though the daughter reports to be fine.

Clearly, as an empirical research strategy, this would involve much more work than other approaches to wellbeing, which are typically based on a questionnaire of the person whose wellbeing is evaluated. Nevertheless, if families and friends of an adapted person would be immune to adaptation about views on the good life with respect to the person evaluated, this would resolve the tension the three claims pose. This is, however, not the case. The adaptation of evaluation standards as a result of deprivation does not only affect individuals, but communities, if not societies as a whole. In a community that collectively suffers deep deprivations, the person who suffers least may be considered to lead a good life, but this does not mean her life is good.

Such evaluations may have the benefit that personal whimsicalities may be avoided. But, it also comes with a disadvantage. While a family, or a person's community at large, may have a more neutral and cool stance towards evaluating the wellbeing of their friend or family member, they may also apply community values which would not be beneficial for the person that is being evaluated. For example, a person living in a conservative religious community, who has recently acknowledged her own homosexuality, may do well in her own view, while their community may strongly disagree with this. People may adapt exactly to the views a community may impose, while such adaptation is clearly goes against a person's interest.[61] Even if a community itself would be more robust to adaptation of some sorts, it may also hold biases as a community that would ultimately not contribute to the objectivity of the wellbeing evaluation.

[61] Ingrid Robeyns, for example, writes: "Most versions of the capability approach advocate for people being involved in determining which capabilities are relevant, and how to weight them. But this opens a can of worms that are well-known to social choice theorists and theorists of deliberative democracy, such as the tyranny of the majority." (2006, 373). David Clark (2009) argues that the force of the adaptation argument is so strong that it seems difficult to see how it would not result in a total neglect of poor voices, a result that clearly seems to go against main motivations behind the capability approach.

So, existing measures and proposals are not successful in resolving the challenge put forward in the former section. Is this due to the lack of creativity of empirical researchers? What the discussion so far illustrates is that there is a deeper problem. The capability approach has two deep commitments that are in conflict. On the one hand it has a commitment to the view that deprivation is more than the effect it has on mental states and wellbeing should not be equated with mental states, because they are malleable. On the other hand, it acknowledges that what makes a life go well is deeply personal. However, the only access we have of individual values that determine what constitutes a good life is through mental states themselves. Richardson's criticism to approaches using life satisfaction as a proxy of wellbeing, and "compromise" made in the capability based quality of life measures in health are an inevitable part of the approach as a framework for the measurement of wellbeing. Such criticism seems unfair in light of the unresolved tension within the approach. The empirical researchers were setup for failure—or, at least set up to be inconsistent with their theoretical framework. Strictly speaking the two commitments (2 and 3) need not make the measurement of wellbeing impossible. But, in any realistic sense they do.

5. Objections

The conclusion drawn at the end of the last section may be considered too grim, and there are a number of objections to it that need to be acknowledged.

A possible objection to the pessimistic conclusion is that my interpretation of wellbeing pluralism has been too narrow. While it may not be possible in scientific practice to differentiate how different capabilities affect wellbeing for different individuals, some rough differentiations can clearly be made. Indeed, the discussion on wellbeing pluralism within the capability approach is vague and underspecified. And indeed, we could interpret wellbeing pluralism as something that can be satisfied objectively. For example, we could formulate wellbeing lists either a priori or by means of consensus methods that differentiate between rough *categories* of people such as children and adults, the elderly and younger adults, pregnant and non-pregnant women, etc. This would not result in individual differences in how different functionings and capabilities constitute for different individuals wellbeing, but it would do so with respect to classes of people, and would thereby be able to incorporate some of the pluralistic intuition described in claim 3.

Nevertheless, such an interpretation would completely erode the concept of wellbeing pluralism. Some of the reasons why mobility may be more important to someone than others may be due to *type* of person she is: young, educated, female, etc. However, for the most part it is due to her *individual* makeup. Rather than other people in her category, she may find traveling particularly exhilarating. Not only would such an interpretation of wellbeing pluralism be erosive, it would also strongly go against the spirit of the capability approach to take diversity seriously, and accept the variety of good lives that people may lead.

A second objection is that even if there is no way to identify individual weights, we may be able to make welfare comparisons—or, measure welfare—whenever one person dominates another in all possible capability and functioning dimensions. If all the functionings and capabilities constituting wellbeing are identified, and person A does better on all dimensions than person B, we can be entitled to say that A has a higher wellbeing than B. While this is a fair point, and while it illustrates how wellbeing may be measured in an ordinal fashion in some instances, a number of caveats apply. Firstly, this possibility only provides a rather limited possibility of welfare comparisons. If there is a large list of things that matter to wellbeing, it is unlikely that there are many cases in which comparisons can be made on ground of dominance. Even the severely deprived are able to achieve functionings and capabilities in their lives that the wealthy may miss, such as close family ties, time to spend with family members, or religious fulfillment. It would be a disappointing measure of welfare that is unable to conclude that a wealthy New Yorker is higher on wellbeing than a poor Indian living in a slum, just because the New Yorker does not dominate on *all* the wellbeing dimensions.[62] Secondly, it is not at all that obvious that a domination of a capability set necessarily leads to a higher wellbeing (Vallentyne and Tungodden 2013). For example, a person who likes to travel and has much mobility options, but poor access to shelter, may be better off than a person who has a similar capability set with even more mobility options if that latter person is very homey and does not like to travel. Domination in a set of functionings and capabilities does not necessarily make a person better off.

[62] Sen seems to disagree with the view that dominance rankings would be very rare, and notes that in practice dominance rankings would cover the most important cases (1985a, 20, fn. 7). He does not present an argument for this, however.

Lastly, a final objection is that claim 2—stating the skeptical attitude of the capability approach towards personal life assessment—is formulated too strongly. While Nussbaum would support it as it stands, Sen, and other capability scholars, are open to the view that while information about self-assessed happiness and satisfaction should not be used to index a wellbeing measure, personal evaluation of wellbeing values, or a self-assessment of wellbeing at large, can be used for this purpose. Someone who would defend this position would have to explain why it is that the arguments that apply to the former—such as the adaptation argument—do not apply to the latter. Such an argument is yet forthcoming, and I see no coherent way in which such argument can be made. However, if this option would be open to a capability measure of wellbeing, it would be possible to use this information to index the relevance of functionings and capabilities to individual welfare, avoiding the skeptical conclusion that was drawn in the previous section.

The objections show that there are ways to resist the skeptical conclusion, but that these leave much to be explained.

6. Conclusion

If measures of wellbeing cannot satisfy non-reliance on subjective evaluations (claim 2) at the same time as sensitivity to personal weighting of the functionings and capabilities set (claim 3), we must doubt that the capability approach is able to measure wellbeing in terms of functionings and capabilities (claim 1). So, if the argument in this paper is accepted, one of these should be abandoned or changed.

One possible conclusion to be drawn—dropping claim 1—is that the capability approach actually is a framework of thinking about wellbeing that shows that the concept of wellbeing is not something that can be measured. Wellbeing is a complex concept, and while the kind of pieces of information required to make judgments about wellbeing can be identified within the approach, it is overly ambitious to believe that it can be measured in a procedurally standardized way.

A second response is to drop claim 2. On this view, there is no principled reason to reject subjective judgments of wellbeing altogether. We could, for example, embrace Sen's suggestion that personal values can be identified in a somewhat reliable fashion. While this would not result in a perfectly reliable judgment, smart social scientist would be able to come up with ways to overcome measurement problems. Many researchers have already embraced such a synthesis between the

capability approach and approach to wellbeing measured based on subjective judgments (Comim 2005; Cookson 2005; Schokkaert 2007; Anand et al. 2009; Binder 2014; Al-Janabi, Flynn, and Coast 2012)

Lastly, we could abandon the commitment to wellbeing pluralism Robeyns identified (claim 3). On this conclusion, the wellbeing value of functionings and capabilities is ultimately universal. Things that constitute wellbeing, such as mobility, health, friendships, etc. constitute wellbeing for everyone in the same degree. The relative importance of friendship, for example, is not personal, but shared among all.

While all of these solutions require a significant alteration of the position the capability approach represents, in my view, none of the solutions threaten the key insights the capability approach has provided in relation to the debate about social justice (see also Begon 2016). Nevertheless, it shows the challenges involved in measuring wellbeing. Wellbeing measurement clearly is very important. At the same time, from a theoretical point of view, interpersonal diversity as well as endorsement of the adaptation argument are highly attractive positions to hold, not only from a capability perspective. This makes the measurement of wellbeing practically infeasible. Perhaps, in line with Sen's words in the epigraph of this chapter, a fully sound measurement of wellbeing may be an unachievable ideal.

Chapter 7: Are Measures of Wellbeing Philosophically Adequate?[63]

1. Introduction

While wellbeing has played an important motivational role in the foundation of many social sciences, wellbeing itself has generally not been seen as a measurable object,[64] in particular in twentieth-century economics (cf. Colander 2007; see Alexandrova and Haybron 2012). However, in recent years, this has been changing. A variety of measures of wellbeing has gained acceptance as objects of study in economics and other social sciences. Research questions about wellbeing—such as whether our wellbeing has improved with the rise in income in the past 40 years—are now widely being posed and studied by empirical researchers (e.g. Easterlin 1995; Stevenson and Wolfers 2008; A. E. Clark, Frijters, and Shields 2008; Easterlin et al. 2010). The fact that social scientists have now pointed their arrows toward this important concept is laudable provided that the reasons for believing that the measures are successful at measuring wellbeing are sound. Unfortunately, evaluating whether this is the case is difficult. There is a significant variety of different measures and constructs in the literature. Moreover, there is an even larger variety of views on how specific measures relate to the concept of wellbeing.[65] At least some of these disagreements are based on a deep conceptual disagreement on the nature of wellbeing. The selection of a particular conceptualization of wellbeing for the development of wellbeing measures lands social scientific study in the morass of a difficult philosophical question: *what is wellbeing*?

The conceptual foundation of wellbeing research faces an important challenge: Assuming that researchers would like to construct

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[64] While there is research on wellbeing in sociology and development studies in earlier stages (e.g. Easterlin 1974; see also the Scandinavian approach, e.g. Erikson and Uusitalo 1986), this did not receive widespread attention it has gotten over the last decades (Fleurbaey 2009; Noll 2011). The idea that wellbeing could not be measured was more centrally present (Colander 2007; Alexandrova and Haybron 2012).

[65] For example, there is much discussion about whether SWB is equivalent to wellbeing, an indicator of wellbeing, or a dimension thereof (see chapter 3, and footnote 68 below).

wellbeing measures on the basis of a thorough philosophical foundation, it is not clear which philosophical foundation they should use. The application of philosophical theories to formulate or evaluate wellbeing measures in science is problematic for at least two reasons. First, the purpose of philosophical theories is first and foremost not to make wellbeing measurable, but to capture the necessary and sufficient conditions—or the essence—of wellbeing. For example, the popular view among philosophers that wellbeing is the satisfaction of rational and informed desires may very well be a plausible philosophical theory of wellbeing, but cannot be directly employed in empirical practice, unless some procedure is specified by which rational and informed desires can be identified in practice.[66] Second, there is much disagreement in philosophy about the correct theory of wellbeing, and the literature is filled with compelling arguments against all major theories. Even though wellbeing constructs in scientific practice and philosophical theories are different in their aims, the question whether wellbeing measures are successful at capturing wellbeing depends on our view on the nature of wellbeing. A certain wellbeing construct may be sound or misguided depending on which theory of the nature of wellbeing is correct. This latter problem—which I call *the problem of conceptual uncertainty*—has attracted a discussion in philosophy, in which a number of solutions have been proposed (Sondøe 1999; Alexandrova 2012b, 2015, Hausman 2011, 2015; Wren-Lewis 2014; Hersch 2015; Taylor 2015). The proposed responses to the problem come in roughly two versions. Some have argued that selection of a conceptual framework is more straightforward in specific research contexts (Sondøe 1999; Alexandrova 2012b, 2015). For example, on these accounts, hedonism may be the appropriate theory for assessing wellbeing measures in the context of psychological research, while objective list theories should be applied in the context of wellbeing assessment in development economics. Alternatively, it has also been argued that the problem can be overcome by identifying common practical implications that conflicting conceptual frameworks share. Certain wellbeing measures—such as preferences and subjective

[66] Qizilbash (1998) makes a similar point. However, he argues that it is an assumption, or requirement, of the informed-desire view that people have rational capacities with full information, and presents this is an argument against this view. This, I think, is a mistaken interpretation. The informed-desire view is not committed to the view that people actually have such capacities, but that if they would, their desires would identify with wellbeing. The problem for empirical practice, of course, is that informed desires need to be identified, and when people do not actually have such capacities (or, when researchers are unable to recognize when they do), the approach is impractical.

wellbeing—can be considered to be an indicator, or close determinant, of wellbeing regardless of which theory is endorsed (Hausman 2011, 2015; Wren-Lewis 2014; Taylor 2015). They argue that such agreement is sufficient for making wellbeing judgments.

In this chapter, I aim to develop an alternative way to deal with the problem of conceptual uncertainty in wellbeing science. I argue that there is more relevant agreement about the nature of wellbeing for evaluating wellbeing constructs than may appear from the philosophical debate at first glance. Below, I argue that certain principles, or intuitions, about the nature of wellbeing are both widely shared among contestants in the philosophical debate and make an important difference for the evaluation of empirical wellbeing constructs (Section 3). On this basis, I argue in particular for two principles (Section 4): subject-dependence, a principle stating that wellbeing is an inherent personal notion, and epistemic limitation, stating that there are epistemic limits to evaluating our own wellbeing. The principles are not sufficient to determine a specific wellbeing construct, but they illustrate the conceptual weaknesses of existing measures and help identify improvements (Section 5). In Section 6, I reflect upon other proposed solutions to the problem of the evaluation of wellbeing measures in light of philosophical disagreement. But, first, I will characterize the literature on wellbeing in philosophy and the social sciences and describe conceptual uncertainty in some more detail.

2. Wellbeing Science and Conceptual Uncertainty

As the present focus lies with the concept of wellbeing in different disciplines, it is important to distinguish the relationships between the terms that are used. A *concept* is a basic building block of thought. In case of wellbeing, there is a semantic agreement that wellbeing is what makes life good for the person living it, but there is no agreement about what this means on a more concrete level. Philosophical *theories* of wellbeing describe necessary and sufficient conditions for wellbeing on a substantive level. In the context of social scientific research, a *construct*, similarly, is a constituent of thought, but one that is developed with the particular purpose of operationalizing it, or, in other words, making it measurable. (Hence, constructs are concepts, but not all concepts are constructs.) A construct may be formulated to relate closely to a concept of interest. Finally, a *measure* is a numerical representation of such a construct. In this, measures come with a particular methodology.

Subjective wellbeing is a construct which is often identified with the concept of wellbeing itself, while it can be measured, among other things, by means of a self-reported Life Satisfaction Scale survey question ranging from zero to 10.

As discussed in chapter 1, philosophical theories of wellbeing are classically grouped into three categories (originating from Parfit 1984): (1) hedonism—the view that wellbeing consists in enjoyable experiences (Crisp 2006; Bradley 2009; Feldman 2010), (2) desire-satisfaction theories—which maintain that wellbeing consists in the fulfillment of (possibly qualified) desires (Murphy 1999; Lukas 2009), and (3) objective list theories of wellbeing, which state that wellbeing is found in a set of goods which are considered to be valuable independent of a person's attitude toward them (Finnis 1980; Murphy 2001; Rice 2013; Fletcher 2013). This taxonomy does not exhaust the space of existing theories. There are hybrid theories, such as preference-hedonism—the view that wellbeing is constituted by pleasure insofar as we have a positive attitude toward it (Heathwood 2006)—and views that fall outside of the taxonomy—such as value-theories,[67] viewing wellbeing as constituted by the fulfillment of personal values (Tiberius 2008; Yelle 2014).

If we consider the classical taxonomy, constructs of wellbeing are organized, at least at the surface, in a highly similar fashion. A first strand of empirical research is SWB research (chapter 3 and 4; Easterlin 1995; Veenhoven 2000; Kahneman et al. 2004; Diener et al. 2009; see Dolan, Peasgood, and White 2008; and MacKerron 2012 for overviews). While there is much disagreement about the exact relationship between SWB and wellbeing at large, many researchers seem to assume that SWB is a good measure of wellbeing at large (Angner 2011; MacKerron 2012).[68] A second strand, which is particularly popular within (health) economics, studies people's preferences after which it is independently assessed whether these preferences can be said to be satisfied (see chapter 5; Arnesen and Trommald 2005; Benjamin et al. 2014). A last strand of research, which seems to have lost some popularity recently, assesses wellbeing on the basis of objective standards (Erikson and Uusitalo 1986;

[67]Arguably, value-achievement theories are closely related to desire-satisfaction theories, due to their shared subjectivity.

[68]For example, Kahneman and co-authors have suggested on multiple occasion that the direct measurement of momentary pleasure captures wellbeing directly (Kahneman et al. 2004; Kahneman and Krueger 2006), while leading positive psychologist Ed Diener has argued that subjective wellbeing is one of a number of dimensions of wellbeing (Diener, Sapyta, and Suh 1998; Diener 2000).

Boelhouwer 2002).[69] The differences between such measures make a significant difference in the assessment of wellbeing (Gasper 2005; Loewenstein and Ubel 2008).

The similarity between the taxonomies, even if superficial, indicates a tight relationship between philosophical theories of wellbeing and empirical practice. While part of this may have resulted from social scientists having taken inspiration from philosophy (Alexandrova 2012b, 2012a), it also shows the nature of wellbeing plays an important role in determining the efficacy of wellbeing measures. For example, an objective list theorist would not be likely to accept that a hedonic measure captures wellbeing well, while a hedonist might.

The study of wellbeing has attracted much philosophical discussion. In particular, the increasingly popular study of SWB has been heavily criticized by philosophers (Annas 2004; O'neill 2006; Haybron 2007b; Nussbaum 2008; Feldman 2010; Raibley 2012). While these philosophers from different perspectives agree in their critical attitude toward the study of SWB, they diverge in their proposed alternatives. A wellbeing researcher who would want to take such philosophical criticism to heart and adjust a wellbeing construct accordingly, would have to take a philosophical stance and would thus run into the problem of conceptual uncertainty.

For example, Martha Nussbaum (2008) has criticized happiness constructs in wellbeing research in economics and psychology on grounds that some forms of displeasure, or dissatisfaction, can be valuable, while a life filled only with pleasure may not be the prudentially best life possible. At the same time, Fred Feldman (2010) criticizes the same constructs, on grounds that while pleasure is the only thing that contributes to wellbeing, the notion of happiness or pleasure employed by SWB researchers does not capture the right notion of pleasure. Such opposing criticisms, and in particular, its proposed directions of change, are problematic because they depend on the plausibility of the theories of wellbeing from which they stem. Nussbaum's criticism is convincing to someone who accepts her eudemonic position on wellbeing, but it is not convincing to a hedonist. Similarly, Feldman's criticism depends on his specific view on pleasure and wellbeing.

[69]There are also hybrid measures here, such as psychological measures that are based on people's evaluations of a number of dimensions inspired by Aristotle's eudaimonia (see, for example, Deci and Ryan 2008).

Not all wellbeing researchers may be moved by such criticisms, but even if they are, they would have to find their way in selecting a wellbeing theory—all of which are compelling, and all of which have to face up against strong arguments against them (Hausman and McPherson 2006). Even if wellbeing researchers want to take philosophical recommendations seriously, it is not clear to whom they should listen. From the standpoint of scientific practice, Anna Alexandrova (2012b) is clearly correct in arguing that philosophical disagreement is a significant problem for determining the conceptual adequacy of wellbeing constructs in science. Or, as she puts it herself,

> . . . perhaps it is too much to expect that scientists take a stand on the nature of wellbeing. How could a resolution of an ancient philosophical debate be a precondition for a scientific project? (2015, 225)

In this chapter, I take Alexandrova's question to heart. Given the philosophical disagreement regarding wellbeing, we cannot expect empirical research to take a stance in this debate. It would be deeply undesirable if a wellbeing constructs in scientific practice would rely on the plausibility of a highly contentious view in a philosophical debate. In the following section, I develop some arguments for why Alexandrova's worry need not lead us to reject the value of philosophical theorizing for the development of wellbeing constructs. The philosophical debate need not be resolved in order to employ philosophical expertise to the selection and development of wellbeing constructs. There are some important insights from the philosophical debate about the nature of wellbeing that help to demarcate the concept of wellbeing for empirical purposes. The following section describes a methodology to arrive at such insights.

3. Intuitions, Principles, and Theory-Building

Valerie Tiberius characterizes the philosophical method of theorizing about wellbeing as a reflective equilibrium (Tiberius 2013). Because this will be central to the argument, it is useful to quote her at length:

> (1) we start with a theory that purports to make sense of all the relevant considerations (the various intuitions, principles and background theories, i.e., the data); (2) considerations that conflict with this theory are presented

> as objections to the theory; and (3) we modify the theory to meet the objections, explain why the objections needn't be heeded in the first place, or reject the theory entirely and start over. This process is repeated until we have answered all the objections and any further modification to the theory would result in conflict with other, more weighty considerations. (2013, p. 320)

Valerie Tiberius uses the metaphor of data to explain the role of intuitions and principles in philosophical theorizing about wellbeing. Philosophical theories of wellbeing need to fit the intuitions and principles just like scientific theories need to explain the data. Different theories of wellbeing may partly be based on the same intuitions, just like different scientific theories are generally partly based on the same data. This is a significant observation in light of Alexandrova's challenge. There is no agreed upon theory in the philosophical discourse, but it may be there is a body of principles or intuitions that philosophers do agree on. Even if there is no single theory of wellbeing that can be used to evaluate the conceptual adequacy of wellbeing constructs, we can still assess whether wellbeing constructs are compatible with a shared body of philosophical intuitions. In order to meet Alexandrova's challenge, we can assess whether there is a body of intuitions that is shared by philosophers, and can be used to formulate meaningful criteria for the evaluation of the conceptual adequacy of wellbeing constructs in science.[70]

Tiberius does not specify clearly what the nature of intuitions is, nor is this easily done. Intuitions are basic beliefs, or dispositions to belief. In the context of wellbeing, intuitions are basic judgments about what kind of things matter to a person's wellbeing. These can be, but are not restricted to, the kinds of insights that are pumped by philosophical (counter-) examples. For example, Nozick's well-known experience-machine example—in which he purports that most people would not like to plug into a machine that generates great, but unreal experiences—illustrates the intuition that imaginative pleasurable experience is not enough for wellbeing (see Weijers and Schouten 2013). However, they

[70]Placing shared philosophical intuitions at the core of my methodology to identify conceptual constraints in social scientific practice raises the question where these intuitions come from? and who belongs to the relevant group of people to intuit them? While solving these issues is beyond the scope of this chapter, I assume for reasons of feasibility that the debate in academic philosophy is a sufficiently good source to find such intuitions.

may also involve more general beliefs about wellbeing that are often already taken as given—platitudes—such as the idea that being sick generally affects wellbeing negatively. Intuitions can be generalized to form principles. For example, from the intuition pumped by the experience-machine example, we can form a generalized principle that wellbeing requires that our experiences correspond with reality—that they are authentic.[71]

Philosophical theories of wellbeing will contrast each other in the essence, but they may overlap in terms of the intuitions that they are able to capture. Surely, there are many intuitions that are not shared within the philosophical debate about the nature of wellbeing. One such case is whether the experience-machine counter-examples sufficiently ground the intuition that a life of inauthentic pleasure is not a good life to live. Such examples, and corresponding disagreements, exist for other (families of) philosophical theories as well.[72] However, there are shared intuitions too. Consider the example of the intuition that achievements greatly matter to wellbeing. This intuition can be captured by all major theories of wellbeing in some way. For a hedonist, its value is accounted for by the pleasure it provides (Crisp 2006), for a desire-satisfactionist, achievement is the successful reach of an important desire, while objective list theories list achievement as valuable in itself (e.g. Fletcher 2013). The same applies to many intuitions, such as the intuition that being sick affects wellbeing negatively, or that quality friendships contribute to wellbeing. This feature of intuitions about wellbeing—that they may be shared between people holding different views about the nature of wellbeing—is methodologically useful and will be central to the approach developed here.

[71]This distinction between intuitions and principles is underspecified. For the present purpose, the exact demarcation makes little difference. What is important for the present purpose is that different theories of wellbeing may be partly build on the same building blocks—more basic beliefs about wellbeing.

[72]A well-known counter-example against desire-satisfactionist theories of wellbeing is the stranger on the train example from Parfit (1984): you meet a stranger on the train who tells you about some of her pursuits. You like the strangers and would like her endeavors to go well. In fact, her endeavors do go well, but you never learn this. Does this indeed improve your life? It would be counter-intuitive to say so. Similarly, objective list theories often contain achievement as one of the goods that is valuable in itself. Roger Crisp (2006) provides the example of the anhedonic achiever: someone who achieves many important goals, such as becoming a well-known piano player, but finds no pleasure in them. According to Crisp, it would be highly counter-intuitive to say that the anhedonic achiever is leading a good life.

The shared intuitions and principles between different theoretical perspectives provide the opportunity to assess whether wellbeing constructs cohere with a widely shared conceptual understanding of wellbeing in philosophy. To be precise, what I propose is that such overlap in intuitions and basic principles regarding the nature of wellbeing may play the role of a conceptual requirement to meet for wellbeing constructs in empirical practice. This does not only require an identification of agreement but also an answer to a normative question: why should philosophical agreement be authoritative for empirical practice? An appeal to the division of labor of disciplines—philosophy being concerned with conceptual questions—may not suffice. A more promising rationale is that conceptual uncertainty should be dealt with by means of a reflective equilibrium, as described by Tiberius. Wellbeing philosophy may not be a perfect representation of a discourse aimed at such equilibrium, but it is the closest thing to it. Nevertheless, the rationale required for the present methodology is slightly weaker. It starts from the idea that it surely is undesirable if a particular empirical construct is open to criticism on the basis of a particular philosophical view that has some plausibility. For example, Martha Nussbaum's criticism of the SWB approach, based on Aristotelian views on the good life, is, at least to some extent, problematic for the SWB approach to measuring wellbeing. Because Martha Nussbaum's theoretical stance has some plausibility, its grounds for rejecting the SWB approach put the SWB approach in unfavorable light. However, if the SWB approach is open to criticism on grounds of a principle shared by *all* (or a large set of) philosophical theories of wellbeing, it seems detrimental for the approach, and some adjustments are required.

The formulation of the methodology illustrates that it is possible to employ philosophical expertise in the formulation of empirical constructs, even in light of disagreement. Shared intuitions and principles are unlikely to yield a specific empirical construct, and I will certainly not defend a specific empirical construct on their basis presently. However, I will argue that some shared intuitions or principles can be defended and can be used as non-trivial requirements, which will help to illustrate weaknesses in current wellbeing constructs, and to suggest improvements.

4. Two Principles

Specifying shared intuitions, and in particular those that have an important bearing on debates in scientific practice, is challenging. There may be a large variety of shared intuitions that could be used to formulate criteria of conceptual adequacy, such as the intuition that being sick somehow should reduce a person's wellbeing. Such obvious intuitions—or platitudes—may be used to make rough inferences about which wellbeing constructs are clearly false, such as a wellbeing measure based on the length of people's hair.[73] However, platitudes will most likely not yield criteria that are substantive enough to shed any light on the conceptual adequacy of wellbeing constructs (Hersch 2015; cf. Hausman 2011, 2015). In the following, I will focus on intuitions that have played an important role in motivating philosophical theories of wellbeing. Such intuitions also play a central role in motivating many constructs of wellbeing in scientific practice, and thereby have more potential to apply to disputes about wellbeing in scientific practice.

The first starting point is a very broad intuition central to both hedonism and desire-satisfactionism. Hedonism and desire-satisfactionism contrast each other. It may take some creativity to think about cases in which a person is happy without having what she wants, and vice-versa, but not too much. As discussed in chapter 1 and 5, desire-satisfactionism is not a mental-state theory, as a person can have satisfied desires without knowing about it, while hedonism is not a subjective theory, as it implies that pleasure matters even to those who do not want to experience pleasure. However, they do both share an important feature, which Hall and Tiberius (2015) describe as subject dependence (p.177).[74] Subject-dependence is the idea that what makes a person's life go well depends on that individual person's make-up: the way she is like. It denies that what is good for someone can be completely read off her membership of a type or species. Individual characteristics play a role in determining what makes for a good life. Subject-dependence, formulated like this, does not imply desire-satisfactionism, because whatever makes a person happy is also determined by her

[73]Amartya Sen uses this example in an interview conducted with Ingrid Robeyns in May 2010 conducted for the Dutch National Science Foundation.

[74]The intuition describes something different from what Sumner calls subject-relativity, which just states that wellbeing theories must describe an individual's good, rather than something else. The latter does not imply that such individuals cannot be described independent of an individual's make-up. Daniel Haybron calls this intuition internalism.

individual make-up. For the present purpose, we can formulate subject-dependence as follows:

> **Intuition 1 (I1):** *Subject-dependence*: The things that are good in life for the person living it depend on the person's individual characteristics, such as her values, attitudes, desires, and things she enjoys.

Objective theories of wellbeing can be traced back to Aristotle's eudaimonistic view on wellbeing, but in the contemporary literature, they are often formulated in response to problems with hedonistic and desire-based theories. Objective theories are often motivated from the idea that what apparently makes people happy, as well as what they desire, may not be what is good for them. Or, as Mozaffar Qizilbash (2006b, 84) phrases it in the context of desires, "People's actual desires are too often unrelated to what is good for them or in their *interests*." (original emphasis). Amartya Sen,[75] for example, has provided counter-examples to hedonist and desire-based theories to put this point across. One well-known example is the case of adaptation to deprivation:

> Such a person, even though thoroughly deprived and confined to a very reduced life, may not appear to be quite so badly off in terms of the mental metric of desire and its fulfilment, and in terms of the pleasure-pain calculus. (Sen 1992, 7)

A central feature of this central intuition for objective list theories is the idea that a theory of wellbeing should not take people's beliefs about what is good for them, or how well they are doing, at face value. People's desires, as well as their beliefs about what makes them happy, are idiosyncratic, and do not have a necessary relationship to wellbeing. They may be bad sources of information about wellbeing. We can call this intuition *epistemic limitation* and formulate it as follows:

> **Intuition 2 (I2):** *Epistemic limitation*: People's beliefs about personal values, desires, and senses of happiness may be misguided sources of information about wellbeing.

[75]This is not to say that Amartya Sen subscribes to an objective list theory of wellbeing. There is in fact much debate about the kind of theories that are compatible with his capability approach, and it is possible he endorses an informed-desire view (see Qizilbash 2013).

Both these intuitions share an important feature, which is important for the present purpose: as philosophical criteria, they are very weak. They are broadly formulated. Subject-dependence is a weaker version of the subjective intuition—the idea that something can only contribute toward a person's wellbeing if that person has a pro-attitude toward it (Fletcher 2013)—that plays an important role in motivating subjective theories in specific (see Hall and Tiberius 2015). Hedonism is unable to accommodate the subjective intuition, because hedonism implies that pleasure is good for a person even if that person does not want to feel pleasure. However, subject-dependence is central to both theories. Epistemic limitation is occasionally formulated in a stronger fashion as well. Sen, for example, sometimes formulates his intuition about happiness, and desire-satisfaction views, much more fundamental than just being about a person's *perception* of her happiness. For instance, in *On Ethics and Economics*, Sen writes:

> This particular problem of influence of contingent circumstances on the metric of utility is only a reflection of a more basic problem, to wit, the insufficient depth of the criterion of happiness or desire-fulfillment in judging a person's wellbeing (1987, 46).

Such a formulation would, per definition, rule out desire-satisfaction views and hedonism as plausible wellbeing theories. However, in this weaker formulation, this is not obvious.

The weak formulation of these criteria may be seen as making them philosophically hollow. These two formulations clearly are not conclusive as criteria to select a *correct* philosophical theory of wellbeing. However, as I argue below, while they may be considered philosophically hollow, they have an important application in scientific practice. As weak as they may be formulated, the intuitions may still not be widely shared. It seems that **I1** is not a clear consideration for objective theories of wellbeing, while **I2** is not a central concern for hedonists or desire-satisfactionists. While prima facie this may appear to be so, hedonists and desire-satisfactionists are, as a matter of fact, centrally concerned about **I2**, as are objective list theorists about **I1**.

While epistemic limitation may, prima facie, appear hostile toward hedonism and subjectivist theories, there is actually a fairly wide endorsement of the intuition among many proponents of those views. As I argued in chapter 4, in the most well-known hedonist text in which this observation gets attention, John Stuart Mill's (1871) *Utilitarianism*, Mill

defends the view that a lack of high-quality experiences may make people bad judges of their own happiness. I argued that even many simple versions of hedonism, such as Torbjörn Tännsjö's, acknowledge our own limitation in assessing how happy we are.

It is not obvious that this is accepted by all hedonists. For example, Fred Feldman (2010) is not altogether pessimistic about the ability to measure happiness by means of self-assessment. However, he neither believes that we can measure it directly, nor that asking people how happy or satisfied they are would yield sensible answers about happiness. I have not been able to find a defense of hedonism that does not endorse some epistemic limitation to our ability to know how happy we are (see chapter 3 and 4 for a substantive argument against the view that we can know precisely how happy we are; see also Haybron 2007a).

Similarly, desire-satisfactionists are well-aware of the misleading nature of people's desires as sources of information about wellbeing. Peter Railton, in a well-known defense of a desire-satisfactionist account, writes, "There are important classes of cases in which we question whether our good coincides with what we most desire." (1986, 12). Almost all formulations of the desire-based account limit the range of desires that make a difference to wellbeing (see also Qizilbash 2006b). Non-idealized accounts of desire-satisfactionism are rare (e.g. Heathwood 2015). There are (partial) defenses of a simple desire accounts, such as Heathwood (2006) and Murphy (1999) who argue the most plausible form of desire-satisfactionism is a non-idealized version. However, both acknowledge that their defense goes straight against the status quo. Murphy writes:

> . . . differences [among desire-satisfaction theorists] should not distract us from the remarkable consensus reached among [desire Fulfillment] theorists both that the theory should appeal not to actual desires but to desires had in a hypothetical desire situation and that the idealization of the information available to the agent will be a feature of that hypothetical desire situation. (1999, 248)

So, we can safely conclude that both hedonism and desire-satisfactionist theories of wellbeing take epistemic limitation seriously and are generally able to accommodate it. While there are some theorists who believe that simple desire-satisfactionist theories are more plausible than idealized ones, they are a clear exception.

In Parfit's taxonomy, objective list theories are defined as those theories that formulate a list of global goods in life that are valuable for a person, independent of that person's attitude toward them.[76] So, for example, if an objective list includes friendship, friendship matters to everyone regardless of whether someone wants to have friends. At first sight, it seems the contrast with **I1** could not be bigger. However, the contrast may be illusionary. For one, hedonism shares the same feature. A hedonist also believes that happiness matters to someone independent of whether that person cares about happiness. Whether or not an objective list is able to incorporate **I1** depends on the specific goods on the list (Fletcher 2015). An objective list that includes happiness, pleasure, and the achievement of personal goals makes wellbeing dependent on the individual characteristics of a person. What is objective in objective list theories is the prudential value ascribed to the goods on the list, but the nature of these goods themselves may still be subject-dependent, such as in case of pleasure. Whether they generally are is an open question. Guy Fletcher's (2013) formulation of an objective list theory expresses an explicit concern for attitude-dependence as a criterion for goods on an objective list. John Finnis's (1980) defense does not express such explicit concern. Nevertheless, most authors do. Qizilbash, for example, puts himself to this task: "I need to show that [my] view of wellbeing is compatible with considerable variety in the forms of life that are good. It is crucial that the prudential values make (distinctively) human lives better" (Qizilbash 1998, 67; see also Brink 1989, 233 for a similar position)

For our purpose, we can identify two ways in which objective list theories have been concerned with subject-dependence. First, objective list theories are often concerned about human diversity: the view that there is a variety of lives that can be prudentially good for different people. Some objective lists leave the account explicitly open, or vague, with the purpose of leaving space for individual differences (Brink 1989; Qizilbash 1998; Nussbaum 2000). For example, in relationship to human diversity, Nussbaum argues,

[76]Parfit (1984, 4) writes, "On the *objective list theories*, certain things are good or bad for us, even if we would not want to have the good things or avoid the bad things." (original emphasis) I will base myself on the following defenses and formulations of objective list theories, which, to my knowledge, is an exhaustive list of recent formulations of objective list theories: Finnis (1980), Brink (1989), Griffin (1986), Qizilbash (1998), Murphy (2001), Fletcher (2013), Rice (2013), and Nussbaum (2001). Nussbaum's list, however, is arguably not an objective wellbeing theory, but a public conception of the human good for the purpose of democratic theorizing.

> I can begin by insisting that this normative conception of human capability and functioning is general, and in a sense vague, for precisely this reason. The list claims to have identified in a very general way components that are fundamental to any human life. But it allows in its very design for the possibility of multiple specifications of each of the components. (1995, 93)

Second, objective lists generally include clear subject-dependent goods, such as personal goals (Brink 1989); accomplishment or achievement[77] (Fletcher 2013; Qizilbash 1998); happiness, pleasure or enjoyment (Fletcher 2013; Qizilbash 1998; Nussbaum 2000), practical reason or autonomy (Finnis 1980; for Nussbaum 2000; Qizilbash 1998; and in Brink 1989 this plays the role of making accounts sensitive to personal differences).

The remaining category of objective list theories makes the list completely subject-independent. Such list would include goods that in no way depend on a person's individual make-up. For example, some goods, such as bodily and mental health, may be considered to be good for a person in the same form for everyone. If human achievement, or knowledge, could be specified without relying on personal aims, goals, and values, the same would apply to those values. A subject-independent objective list would include only such goods. Examplars are difficult to find. While not an objective list theory of wellbeing, Thomas Hurka (1993) argues that perfectionism's view on the human good (which strictly speaking concerns prudential as well as moral values[78]) is dependent only on the human essence, excluding personal essence. Aristotle is sometimes interpreted to present a subject-independent view on human wellbeing, but modern Aristotelian accounts generally do not accept such a stance (Haybron 2016). Richard Kraut (1979) has defended a subject-dependent view of Aristotle's eudaimonia, in which personal satisfaction and psychological happiness play a crucial role. Overall, defenders of objective list have made sufficient space for subject-dependence in their views. Objective list theories share the view that there is a plurality of

[77]Personal achievement or accomplishment can be understood in both a personal and universal way. It may be that what counts as accomplishment is universal for all humans. However, it seems more plausible to think about achievements as being person-relative.

[78]Hurka is somewhat unclear at this point. While his view on the human good does seem to be similar to objective list theories, he explicitly argues that he does not believe that perfectionism provides an account of wellbeing, that is, a theory of what is "good for" people, but only an account of what is good, generally speaking.

goods that matter to human beings, but at the same time, individual identity seems to play an important role in determining what kind of life is specifically good for a particular individual.

If the argument presented here is correct, there is more agreement at the level of important intuitions than appears from the disagreement on the level of wellbeing theories. While the two principles defended are very broadly formulated, they indicate that there is an important agreement about what wellbeing is that limits the set of permissible wellbeing constructs. We have reached an ecumenical, but attractive conclusion: while philosophers are indeed in deep disagreement about the correct theory of wellbeing, there is an important and interesting agreement about some significant intuitions about wellbeing.

5. Living Up to Standards

The position defended so far points to two important implications of the development of wellbeing constructs in science. First, on the basis of **I1**, wellbeing constructs should be required to make space for individual differences in what kind of lives are good for different people. It may be that ultimately wellbeing is identical to happiness, but if so, it should be acknowledged that the kind of things that make a person happy may be different for different people. Similarly, it may be that there is a variety of goods that make up wellbeing, but if so, it should be acknowledged that different kinds of lives can be good for different people. Second, on the basis of **I2**, wellbeing constructs should be required to acknowledge people's epistemic limitations in evaluating their own wellbeing. Even if wellbeing is solely a subject-dependent value such as happiness or satisfaction, people may misjudge their happiness, and wrongly identify the desires relevant for their wellbeing. While these two requirements are based on philosophically weak assumptions, their tension is obvious. It is difficult to make an empirical construct sensitive to individual differences without relying on individual judgments of wellbeing (see chapter 6). Nevertheless, the two requirements do leave some space. I will first apply these requirements to the main wellbeing constructs in empirical practice, and point toward directions of improvement.

First, consider happiness research. The most widely used constructs in this field of research—general happiness questions, general life satisfaction questions, and momentary happiness measures—are specifically based on the assumption that people are good sources of information about their levels of wellbeing. The constructs are often

motivated by the idea that wellbeing is something personal, about which the individual surely knows more than a third-party observer. Martin Binder (2014), for example, cites such non-paternalistic sentiment as a main attraction of the approach. This focus on the personal seems motivated by, and is clearly compatible with, **I1**: wellbeing is ultimately something that depends on our individual make-up. However, in emphasizing the personal and non-paternalistic, it goes by on concerns regarding **I2**: people's fallibility in evaluating their own wellbeing. This point has actually been at the center of some of the well-known philosophical criticisms of the SWB approach to wellbeing measurement from the capability perspective, in the form of the adaptation argument (chapter 3). However, it has not often been recognized that the criticism need not be based on a non-hedonistic, or non-desire-based view, on wellbeing. For example, Wayne Sumner's (1996) theory of wellbeing as authentic life satisfaction is often used to motivate the subjective nature of SWB measurement (e.g. Dolan, Peasgood, and White 2008; Schimmack, Schupp, and Wagner 2008). However, Sumner himself endorses an epistemic limitation in his view that is often left out of SWB research. According to Sumner, life satisfaction itself may not be a good guide to wellbeing in case this satisfaction is inauthentic, that is, based on false beliefs about reality.[79] Such a qualification of subjective judgments is often not acknowledged in the empirical literature (Binder 2014 is an example of an exception). Another conceptual framework cited by some working on (momentary) happiness measurement is Jeremy Bentham's narrow hedonism (Kahneman, Wakker, and Sarin 1997; Blanchflower and Oswald 2004; Veenhoven 2010). However, as mentioned above, even contemporary defenders of such a view in philosophy do not believe that people themselves tend to be infallible sources of their own experienced momentary happiness levels (see chapter 4). In short, there is a discrepancy between conceptualizations of wellbeing in happiness research and the philosophical discourse, even if we consider happiness research's closest philosophical allies: hedonists and subjectivists.

Does the same apply to preference-satisfaction–based measures of wellbeing that have recently found some renewed interest? In the article by Daniel Benjamin et al. (2014), elaborately discussed in chapter 5, a

[79]Sumner's example is of a woman who is satisfied with her life in part because she has a successful and happy marriage. However, she is unaware her husband has love affairs. While the woman is satisfied, her satisfaction is inauthentic, because it is based on false beliefs. For this reason, we are not correct in asserting that her life goes well for her.

general procedure is proposed to measure wellbeing on the basis of such a utility framework. Like in case of SWB measures, the proposed preference-based measure is clearly able to accommodate **I1**. In fact, the authors explicitly describe non-paternalism as being important to them:

> we believe it is more attractive to rely on what people's own stated preferences suggest about what they themselves care about than to paternalistically rely on the opinions and introspections of "experts" (such as researchers and policymakers) regarding which aspects to track and how to weight them. (2014, 2703).

What is interesting about this example is that its defenders acknowledge some of the conceptual problems in measuring preferences. They have to assume that what people choose is what they call "'(true)' preference" (Benjamin et al. 2014, 2703). As a matter of fact, they argue that with respect to the instrument that they develop, the "assumption is surely wrong." The reasons they provide are, however, not exactly the same as the reasons that have moved desire-satisfaction theorists to qualified versions of their views in philosophy: "there are known ways in which stated preference is biased relative to incentivized choice, for example when one choice option is viewed as more socially desirable" (Benjamin et al. 2014, 2703). The problems that philosophers see go further than such biases. As discussed above, most desire-satisfaction theorists worry that in a variety of (very real) cases, people may take on desires whose satisfaction does not contribute to their wellbeing. Benjamin et al. acknowledge that their empirical strategy cannot be used to identify a difference between "right" or "correct," preferences, and biased, or "false," ones. They argue that they believe their stated preference approach gets close enough. However, if we do take **I2** seriously, we see the empirical construct has an important conceptual flaw, whether it is (partly) acknowledged or not.

Finally, we can consider the objective approach to wellbeing measurement. Unfortunately, this approach is much less unified. One view within the objective wellbeing measurement literature is that wellbeing judgments can only be made very limitedly, namely, only in case of domination: when for one person one of the wellbeing dimensions is higher than those of another person, while the rest is at least as high, the first person is better off. However, all-encompassing judgments cannot be made, because some dimensions may be more important to some than others (see chapter 6; Erikson and Uusitalo 1986). As argued

in chapter 6, these types of judgments are very limited, but compatible with the personal nature of wellbeing (**I1**), as well as with the idea that subjective information may not be a reliable source of wellbeing (**I2**). However, in empirical applications, such overall judgments are often desirable (Boelhouwer 2002; Anand et al. 2009). In such cases, dimensions of wellbeing (or wellbeing capabilities) have to be aggregated somehow.

As discussed in chapter 6, the capability approach generally acknowledges that life aspects—functionings—matter differently to different people, meeting **I1**. However, in the empirical context, taking account of such heterogeneity without relying on subjective judgments is difficult. In empirical applications, every dimension of wellbeing is generally counted similarly for every individual (Boelhouwer 2002; Anand et al. 2009). In other words, the difference in importance of the different dimensions to different people is not accounted for. Objective wellbeing measures are sometimes explicitly motivated by the idea that subjective valuations may be misguided sources of information about wellbeing, and thus successfully accommodate **I2**. However, objective measurements of wellbeing that do not take into account that the value of objective factors, like education, housing, and culture, are somehow different for individuals fail to accommodate **I1**.

We can safely conclude that while the discussed intuitions are not controversial within the philosophical debate, and as such not particularly useful in theory-choice, the same does not apply to the context of construct-selection in wellbeing science. While they appear to be very weakly formulated, as a matter of fact, the three main strands of wellbeing research are unable to accommodate both completely. In Martin Binder's (2014) recent proposal to develop a wellbeing construct based on SWB using the capability framework, large deviations from an estimated "capability-to-be-happy"—based on objective indicators—from actual SWB scores are taken as evidence that a person has had adapted preferences, in which case the subjective report is disregarded. While Binder focuses on a limited set of possible ways in which information about people's perceptions about their life satisfaction of happiness may be misguiding sources of information about their wellbeing, his approach accommodates **I2** and **I1**, and is innovative in doing so. Examples such as these—while rare—show that even though it is by no means easy to formulate concrete proposals of constructs that can accommodate both intuitions, it is possible to do so.

6. Relationship to Other Solutions

While the present suggestion of dealing with the problem of conceptual uncertainty about wellbeing does not conflict with alternative proposals, there are some advantages to endorsing the proposal compared with the proposals that have been put forward so far.

First, it has been suggested by a number of different authors that some platitudes are correct on all theories of wellbeing, but that such platitudes are nevertheless helpful in resolving some problems with respect to conceptual uncertainty. For example, Daniel Hausman argues,

> Platitudes concerning what makes people better or worse off like the claims that enjoyment contributes to wellbeing and illness diminishes it depend on no philosophical theory that specifies what things are intrinsically good for people and why. (Hausman 2011, 7; see also Hersch 2015).

Tim Taylor has recently defended a list of what he calls markers of wellbeing, which are *either* constitutive, a causal promoter, or an indicator of wellbeing. Taylor argues that such markers may be sufficient to develop wellbeing measures for the purpose of policy making: ". . . although only certain theories regard health as constitutive of wellbeing in its own right, a much wider range of theories—perhaps all mainstream theories (see below)—could acknowledge it as a marker of wellbeing" (Taylor 2015, 76). While there is some similarity between the present proposal and theirs, there is an important difference too. The approach defended here focuses only on agreement among philosophers regarding the concept of wellbeing itself, rather than its indicators or causal determinants. Because platitudes, or markers, are based not only on the conceptual nature of wellbeing, but also on its causes and its indicators, the view is overly liberal with respect to what counts as a wellbeing measure (see Hersch 2015 for a more elaborate argument). There is a broad category of things that can be identified as indicative or causally related to wellbeing, but one of the aims of wellbeing researchers is exactly to make wellbeing measurement more "direct" (e.g. Kahneman and Krueger 2006; see Alexandrova 2005, 2008; Angner 2011). Being successful in education and enjoying oneself may both be indicative of wellbeing, but this is not a particularly helpful insight for a researcher who is interested in the question, which party-study balance is most conducive to a college-student's wellbeing? While the approach defended

here does not answer this question directly, it does provide some guidance to researchers who would like to develop wellbeing measures that are able to answer such questions.

Anna Alexandrova (2012a, 2012b, 2015) as well as others (such as Sondøe 1999) has argued that the context in which wellbeing is understood in philosophy indicates a different interest in wellbeing than empirical researchers with a more narrow focus. Wellbeing theories can only be considered relevant or irrelevant in particular contexts. A health researcher interested in the effect of a particular treatment may not be interested in the fulfillment of life-long dreams of the patient that is being assessed, while this may very well be relevant for wellbeing understood by philosophers. Such a contextual perspective has the advantage that it does not require a particular theory of wellbeing to be universally correct, or the philosophical debate to be resolved, in order for the conceptual frameworks to be put into practice. However, this comes at a significant price. For one, it makes particular contextual notions of wellbeing incomparable across different contexts. If wellbeing in the development context is something significantly different from wellbeing in developed countries, comparing wellbeing in poor and wealthy countries may be conceptually impossible, while wellbeing researchers have explicitly posed questions about the comparison of wellbeing between rich and poorer nations (Easterlin 1995; A. E. Clark, Frijters, and Shields 2008). On my view, such comparisons need not be excluded, even though the specific criteria I have proposed illustrate some of the challenges that such comparisons may involve.

7. Conclusion

Wellbeing is a complex and controversial topic. It is unlikely that philosophical debates about its nature will come to a consensus, or conclusion, any time soon. However, if the argument presented is correct, this lack of consensus need not mean that evaluating a measure of wellbeing is a subjective matter. Clear constraints on the measurement of wellbeing can be derived from broadly shared philosophical views. These constraints put social scientists to a challenge. A good measure of wellbeing is subject-dependent, without taking people's views on their own wellbeing at face value. The tension that these constraints leave may prove to be perplexing in certain contexts. Indeed, they may very well explain why certain philosophers have been skeptical about our ability to measure wellbeing entirely (e.g. Hausman 2015).

At the same time, the constraints leave ample space for creative constructs that some social scientists are already developing. While wellbeing science does not yet meet the minimal standards of conceptual adequacy presently defended, the field is undergoing a fast development, and closer synthesis between philosophical and empirical expertise may be forthcoming. If successful, the dream to measure wellbeing may very well be becoming closer and closer.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Is measuring wellbeing impossible?

In the argumentative part of this thesis (chapters 2-7), I have first scrutinized the main measuremental accounts of wellbeing in economics, happiness economics (chapter 3 and 4) and preference-satisfactionism (chapter 5). I argued that we are necessarily limited in knowing the degree of someone's happiness and preference-satisfaction. I then argued in chapter 6 that the capability approach does not offer a feasible alternative to these approaches. These chapters can be interpreted as reasons to be pessimistic about measuring wellbeing in economics. However, in chapter 7 I argued that a notorious problem for the measurement of wellbeing—philosophical disagreement about the concept—need not result in a lack of standards to evaluate measuremental accounts of wellbeing. So, where does this leave us? In chapter 1, we started by asking if we can find empirical answers to questions about wellbeing: does becoming a parent contribute to one's wellbeing or not? Is economic growth good for the population of a country of not? How bad will a change of climate be for us? Do we have reason to be optimistic or pessimistic about our ability to answer such questions empirically? There is a pessimistic outlook and an optimistic one that I would like to review as a way of concluding.

Firstly, both in chapter 6, on the capability approach to wellbeing, and chapter 7, on the axiological adequacy of measuremental accounts of wellbeing, we saw a tension between two commitments that are both plausible as well as practically problematic. Wellbeing is a deeply personal concept, while at the same time, we have good reasons to believe that we are only limitedly able to have assess our own wellbeing, and how good our lives are compared to others. On the basis of the arguments developed in this thesis, we can formulate a general defensible highly skeptical attitude:

1) Regardless of what wellbeing is exactly, either happiness or preference-satisfaction matters intrinsically to wellbeing. Happiness (in one conception or other) matters to wellbeing on most accounts, either because it matters intrinsically, or because people want to be happy (see also chapter 2). On accounts on which this is not the case, such as objective lists accounts that do not

value happiness itself, or desire-accounts if a person does not want to be happy at all, preference-satisfaction, or a related concept, such as goal-achievement, matters for wellbeing (chapter 7).

2) Our ability to measure happiness is limited (chapter 3 and 4), and so is our ability to measure preference-satisfaction (chapter 5).
3) There is always a significant part of wellbeing researchers have limited access to, and hence, wellbeing measures are necessarily incomplete.

This argument, represents the gloomiest picture about our ability to measure wellbeing. However, while such a picture may be correct, there are two important ways in which this pessimism can be resisted.

Firstly, the conclusion of the skeptical argument is that measures of wellbeing are necessarily incomplete. That is, they necessarily allow the possibility to be inaccurate. However, the ultimate goal of measures of wellbeing need not be to be flawless. The argument shows that the possibility of important mismeasurement exists in particular instances, but it does not show how often such mismeasurements will occur and how badly they will affect our inferences. In chapter 3, we touched upon the problem that measurement problems themselves cannot themselves be empirically gauged. This implies that the degree to which these issues present themselves as problems must remain, for an important part, a matter of speculation. Due to the lack of empirical grounds to base such judgements on, this requires a conceptual evaluation that may be different in different instances. We may sometimes have reasons to believe that the problems only play a role to a very limited degree. For example, in case of preference-satisfaction measures, we can wonder how different people's preferences really are. If they are highly similar (contra chapter 2), it may not be problematic to group preferences to reduce the data-demandingness identified in chapter 5. And, with respect to chapter 6, perhaps differences in how functionings and capabilities contribute to wellbeing differently for different individuals may be small. If so, the possibility for mismeasurement that I have identified in this thesis may have little real impact on the extent to which they are able to capture wellbeing successfully. While the extent of problems discussed is difficult to assess, it leaves space for optimism.

Secondly, conditions under which we can reliably measure wellbeing have a contextual nature to them. Comparing the wellbeing of people with vastly different backgrounds, living conditions and aspirations may be much less feasible than making comparisons between people who are highly similar in these respects. The adaptation problem

does not apply to wellbeing comparisons between people who have not adapted, or adapted similarly, to external shocks to their happiness. The problem of qualitative differences in happiness discussed in chapter 4 similarly does not apply to comparisons in happiness between those people who have had very similar experiences. These problems thus leave the possibility to use subjective wellbeing as a wellbeing measure in cases such factors can reasonably be expected to be (roughly) the same among compared groups. Context can also help us in case of preference-satisfaction measures of wellbeing. In the context of health, where the ICECAP-A wellbeing measure (see chapter 5 and 6) was developed, we can reasonably assume certain aspects we may have preferences over are left unaffected, such as preferences over states of the world that are left unaffected by diseases and treatments (world peace, for example). This does not take away from the fact that even in such contexts the welfare aspects over which one has preferences may still be large, but it may make welfare comparisons more feasible.

We have reached a split conclusion. It may be overly ambitious to believe that any wellbeing measure can provide us with sound comparisons across all contexts, even regardless of the particular substantive view on wellbeing one takes. However, under some restrictions, we can be reasonably confident that certain measures can result in sound comparisons conditional on our axiological position on wellbeing. If this is correct, such a state may not be unique to wellbeing research. Many scientific enterprises proceed under specific untestable assumptions. For example, an analogy with the rationality assumption in much of positive microeconomics may be appropriate. Whether or not people are truly rational or not is generally may not be a testable assumption, even though arguments may be provided either way.

Wellbeing is a highly important concept, and we should strive to know more about it. In light of untestable assumptions that are needed to gauge epistemic challenges and conceptual problems, about which we may have good reasons to cast much doubt, the best response seems to be pluralism of approaches. If, on the basis of a variety of doubtful assumptions, the same conclusion is reached, this may still provide some reason to believe it. If on the basis of different assumptions very different conclusions are reached, this casts doubt on the conclusions. Given the problems empirical research on wellbeing is faced with that I have described in my thesis, these types of findings would provide useful insights both about wellbeing itself and the efficacy of our measures.

Sticking to a single measure is putting all your eggs in one basket. In light of a deep disagreement about what the best measure of wellbeing

is, it is unlikely that the field will soon converge to a consensus. This, I conclude, is a good thing.

Policy implications and future research

What does this mean for the possibility of wellbeing policy, that so many wellbeing researchers espouse? Or, stated differently, in light of the challenges for wellbeing science raised in this thesis, what kind of policy implications does wellbeing science have? A first implication is a call for caution in following policy recommendations from research coming out of a single strand of research. For example, if on the basis of SWB studies, it is concluded that age of retirement is neutral with respect to well-being (e.g. Horner 2014), policy makers should not act on such conclusions, before various types of evidence, from different strands of well-being research, are available.

What is more, while empirical research on wellbeing often suggests policy implications, it is not clear how knowledge about wellbeing should be translated into policy. Some of the chapters have discussed the particular demands of wellbeing science applied to the context of policy, but this question does not only pertain to the extent to which wellbeing science can successfully capture wellbeing in a policy context, but also on what the role of the government is taken to be in the promotion of wellbeing. In political philosophy, the idea that the promotion of wellbeing is the sole aim of the government—welfarism—is highly controversial. However, on the other hand, the idea that wellbeing should be of no concern to the government whatsoever is also not particularly plausible. In recent years, some philosophers have started to draft proposals of how our knowledge about wellbeing should affect policy (in particular, Haybron and Tiberius 2015). However, the arguments in this thesis, which challenge our ability to have knowledge about wellbeing, only complicates this discussion. Given the importance of the wellbeing concept, giving up our aim to know more about wellbeing to make lives better would be deeply unfortunate. Can wellbeing still be an aim of the government given our limited ability to know what wellbeing is and how best to measure it? While I cannot provide an answer to these questions now, future research hopefully can.

Samenvatting

Welzijn is het concept dat beschrijft hoe goed ons leven is voor degene die het leven leidt. Dit is een behoorlijk belangrijk en breed concept. In dit proefschrift wordt de vraag beantwoord: In welke mate kan welzijn in de economie empirisch bestuurd worden? Daarbij analyseer ik de verschillende methodologische benaderingen in de economische literatuur, en de verschillende filosofische theorieën over het concept. In de economie hebben een verscheidenheid aan benaderingen een belangrijke positie in de empirische literatuur verworven; specifiek: gelukseconomie, dat welzijn meet op subjectieve wijze, voorkeur-gebaseerde welzijnsmaten, en de *capability approach*, geïnitieerd door Amartya Sen. Dit proefschrift onderzoekt in welke mate deze stromingen erin slagen om welzijn te meten.

Hoofdstuk 2 is een verkennend hoofdstuk. Het bespreekt het probleem dat hoewel het idee dat welzijn multidimensionaal gemeten zou moeten worden wijd geaccepteerd is, het identificeren van deze dimensies erg lastig is. Het hoofdstuk presenteert een empirisch onderzoek naar de visie van mensen op hun welzijn. Een aantal typische visies worden geïdentificeerd die samen de visies van mensen goed kunnen verklaren. Hoewel we vinden dat het beeld van veel mensen overeenkomt met een visie dat welzijn voornamelijk bestaat uit gezond zijn en je gelukkig voelen, vinden we ook dat er veel diversiteit is in de visies die mensen hebben over wat welzijn voor hen betekent.

Hoofdstuk 3-6 gaan over specifieke manieren om welzijn te meten. Gelukseconomie is de afgelopen 20 jaar snel gegroeid, maar gaat wel recht in tegen het prominente idee in de grondslag van het veld binnen de economie dat gaat over welzijn – welvaartseconomie –, namelijk, dat geluk niet meetbaar is op een wetenschappelijke manier. Hoewel gelukseconomen hiertegen inbrengen dat hun geluksmaat wel resulteert in bevindingen die goed te rationaliseren zijn, is deze aanpak nog steeds controversieel binnen de economie. Hoofdstuk 3 en 4 bespreken filosofische problemen binnen deze school. Ik analyseer eerst een veelbesproken tegenwerping tegen de gelukseconomie, namelijk het probleem dat onze aspiraties en voorkeuren zich kunnen aanpassen aan slechte omstandigheden, zodat zelfs tijdens langdurige ontberingen mensen zich gelukkig kunnen voelen, terwijl hun leven duidelijk niet goed is voor ze. Hoewel dit vaak als een probleem wordt gezien voor

filosofische welzijnstheorieën beargumenteer ik dat er ook een alternatieve manier is om de tegenwerping te begrijpen, namelijk dat in het geval van adaptatie (zoals dit probleem genoemd wordt), we onze standaarden om ons geluk te evalueren aanpassen, ondanks dat we net zo (on)gelukkig blijven. Ik beargumenteer dat als argument tegen gelukseconomie het laatste probleem plausibeler en toepasselijker is. Dit impliceert dat zelfs als welzijn bestaat uit geluk, geluk moeilijk te meten is in het geval dat adaptatie optreedt.

In hoofdstuk, 4, wordt het succes van gelukseconomie ook onderzocht, maar dit hoofdstuk limiteert zichzelf deze keer tot de vraag of het succesvol is als methode om geluk te meten. Het hoofdstuk beschrijft dat veel gelukseconomen Jeremy Bentham's conceptie van geluk lenen, maar niet ingaan op de problemen die andere filosofen hebben genoemd met betrekking op deze theorie. Ik analyseer Mill's kritiek op Bentham's theorie en illustreer dat als we een plausibel aspect van zijn kritiek ter harte nemen, dit significante implicaties heeft voor ons vermogen om ons eigen geluk te meten – een cruciale aanname voor de methodologie van gelukseconomie. Deze kritiek is dat het hebben van nieuwe ervaringen de manier hoe we geluk evalueren verandert. Dit impliceert dat mensen die flink uiteenlopende ervaringen hebben gehad hetzelfde geluk anders kunnen beoordelen. Hoewel dit een ander probleem is dan het adaptatieprobleem, laten beide problemen zien dat ons vermogen om ons eigen geluk op een vergelijkbare manier te beoordelen gelimiteerd is.

De voorkeur-bevredigingsconceptie van welzijn staat centraal binnen de economische theorie, maar wordt over het algemeen niet gebruikt om het welzijn van individuen te meten. Recentelijk, als antwoord op de ontwikkelingen binnen de gelukseconomie, zijn economen begonnen met het maken van voorkeurs-indexen om welzijn te meten. In hoofdstuk 5 analyseer ik de specifieke uitdagingen waarmee dergelijke methodes te kampen hebben als ze succesvol willen zijn in het meten van welzijn. Ik beargumenteer dat, hoewel het in principe mogelijk is om dit succesvol te doen, een aantal centrale aspecten van de voorkeurstheorie van welzijn zoveel informatie vereisen om te meten, dat het in de praktijk niet mogelijk is om welzijn op deze manier te meten, zonder tekort te doen aan de voorkeurstheorie van welzijn. In het bijzonder, het feit dat de verscheidenheid aan voorkeuren die mensen kunnen hebben onbeperkt is, en dat voorkeuren wel individueel-specifiek zijn, zijn voorbeelden van dit soort aspecten. Bovendien is het zo dat om

een maat nuttig te laten zijn deze ook vergelijkbaar moet zijn tussen individuen en binnen individuen over dezelfde tijd. Dit zijn ook aspecten die veel informatie over de voorkeuren van individuen vereisen. Derhalve zijn welzijnsmaten gebaseerd op voorkeuren slechts praktisch mogelijk als een aantal centrale aspecten niet worden gerespecteerd.

Een potentieel alternatief voor zowel de geluksbenadering en de voorkeursbenadering is de *capability approach*. De *capability approach* is een breed evaluatief raamwerk dat de dingen die mensen daadwerkelijk doen en zijn – hun functioning – en hun vermogen dit te bereiken – hun capabilities – centraal stelt. Het meten van welzijn is één van de doelen van deze benadering. De *capability approach* is geformuleerd als alternatief voor zowel de voorkeursbenadering als de geluksbenadering, en is gecommitteerd aan het idee dat onze mentale staat niet altijd een goede bron van informatie over welzijn is. Bovendien stelt het pluriformiteit centraal op een aantal verschillende manieren, waarvan er een is dat de waarde van een functioning kan verschillen per individu. In hoofdstuk 6 analyseer ik in welke mate deze ideeën samen kunnen worden gerealiseerd in een welzijnsmaat. Ik concludeer dat dit niet het geval is. Derhalve moet de *capability approach* of 1) zijn scepticisme over subjectieve evaluaties laten varen, of 2) ontkennen dat verschillende functionings in verschillende mate bij kunnen dragen aan welzijn voor verschillende individuen, of 3), ontkennen dat welzijn te meten is.

In hoofdstuk 7 verschuift de aandacht van specifieke benaderingen naar de algemene vraag hoe sociale wetenschappers welzijnsmaten kunnen ontwikkelen in het licht van de onenigheid over het welzijnsconcept. Het hoofdstuk introduceert een term, conceptuele onzekerheid, om dit te beschrijven. Het hoofdstuk beschrijft een aantal posities met betrekking tot dit probleem, zoals het idee dat wetenschappers de filosofische theorie kunnen uitkiezen die het best bij hun veld past. Een andere positie suggereert dat er meer overeenkomsten zijn tussen theorieën als het gaat over de brede categorie van aspecten die *of* welzijn zijn, *of* welzijn veroorzaken, en dat deze brede categorie voldoende basis biedt om wetenschappelijke welzijnsmaten op te baseren. Ik ontwikkel een alternatief op deze twee posities die gebaseerd is op het idee dat niet verwacht kan worden van welzijnsmaten dat ze niet op een controversiële basis gestoeld zijn, maar wel dat ze niet op een basis gestoeld zijn die afwijkt van *alle* belangrijke welzijnstheorieën. Ik beargumenteer dat op basis hiervan we twee centrale principes kunnen

verdedigen. De eerste onderkent het persoons-relatieve aspect van welzijn: wat welzijn ook precies mag zijn, op een substantief niveau is wat ons leven goed maakt iets persoonlijks. Een tweede principe is de ontkenning van het idee dat we zelf perfect kunnen weten hoe goed onze levens zijn. Hoewel er een duidelijke spanning bestaat tussen deze twee principes in het ontwikkelen van welzijnsmaten, suggereer ik ook dat sommige sociale wetenschappers al maten ontwikkelen die rekening houden met deze twee principes.

In het laatste, concluderende hoofdstuk (8) ga ik terug naar mijn onderzoeksvraag, en observeer ik dat de gemaakte argumenten een uitdaging duidelijk maken in het meten van welzijn. Hoewel ik heb beargumenteerd dat welzijn noodzakelijkerwijs persoons-relatief is op een substantief niveau, heb ik ook beargumenteerd dat onze enige methoden voor het meten van persoons-relatieve welzijnsaspecten, geluks- en voorkeursmaten, feilbaar zijn. Ik geef een simpel argument, op de basis van de argumenten gemaakt in dit proefschrift, waaruit volgt dat het niet mogelijk is om een geldig, volledig en context-vrije welzijnsmaat te ontwikkelen. Tegelijkertijd suggereer ik dat het belang van welzijnsmaten zo groot is dat het desondanks toch een concept is dat wetenschappelijk bestudeerd verdient te worden. Het feit dat welzijn moeilijk te meten is, zou niet moeten leiden tot het stoppen met het meten, maar tot een pluralistische benadering. Geen maat kan worden gezien als gouden standaard, en ze moeten allemaal worden gezien als feilbaar, maar dat betekent niet dat ze niet gebruikt moeten worden.

Summary

Wellbeing is a concept that describes how well life is for the person who is living it. This thesis sets out to answer the question: To what extent is it possible to study wellbeing empirically in economics? In doing so I analyze the different methodological strands in the economic literature as well as the philosophical debate on the nature of wellbeing. In economics, a variety of approaches have gained a salient position in the empirical literature. In particular, happiness economics, which uses measures of subjective wellbeing, preference-based measures of wellbeing, and the capability approach, initiated by Amartya Sen.

Chapter 2 is an exploratory chapter. It discusses the challenge that while many agree that measures of wellbeing should be multi-dimensional, identifying the correct dimensions is a challenging task. The chapter presents an empirical investigation on the perceptions that people have regarding wellbeing. A number of typical views are identified, that jointly represent people's views. While we find that that many people align with a view that values physical health and feeling well, there is much variety in the views that people hold with respect to their wellbeing.

Chapter 3-6 deal with specific approaches to wellbeing measurement. Happiness economics has been growing rapidly over the last twenty years, but it goes straight against a prominent idea in the foundation of the subfield of economics that deals with wellbeing – welfare economics –, namely, that happiness cannot be measured scientifically. While happiness economists generally object that their measures result in reasonable findings, their approach still is controversial within economics. Chapter 3 and 4 focus on philosophical problems within this approach. I first analyze one widespread objection against the happiness approach, namely the problem that our aspirations and preferences may adapt to bad circumstances, such that even in prolonged deprivation, people may find happiness, even though their lives are not good for them. While this problem is often seen as an objection against theories of wellbeing that identify wellbeing with happiness, I argue that there is also an alternative interpretation, namely, that in cases of adaptation, people adjust the standards by which they evaluate their own happiness, even though their lives remain equally unhappy. I argue that as an argument against the efficacy of happiness economics, the latter is more plausible and salient.

This implies that while happiness-conceptions of wellbeing may be plausible, our ability to evaluate our happiness may be compromised in case we have adapted.

The subsequent chapter, 4, also questions the extent to which happiness economics is successful, but this time limits itself to the question if it is successful as a method to measure happiness, given a plausible account of happiness. The chapter notes that many happiness economists borrow Bentham's conception of happiness, but do not consider the problems that have been raised in the philosophical literature with this conception. I analyze Mill's criticism of Bentham's conception, and illustrate that taking on board a plausible part of this criticism has significant implications for our ability to rate our own happiness – a crucial assumption for the methodology of happiness economics. The criticism is that having new experiences changes the way we evaluate our own happiness. This implies that people who have had very different experiences may evaluate the same sense of happiness differently. While this is a different problem than the adaptation problem, the problems are both illustrations of the limitation of our ability to evaluate our happiness such that it can be compared between individuals.

The preference-satisfactionist conception of wellbeing has been central in economic theory, but is generally not used to formulate measures of individual welfare. In recent years, in response to the developments of happiness economics, some economists have started to develop preference-indices of welfare. In chapter 5, I analyze the particular methodological challenges that such approaches are faced with if they aim to be a successful preference-satisfaction measure of welfare. I argue that, while it is in principle possible to have such a measure, a number of central commitments of preference-satisfaction theories of wellbeing are so data-demanding that in practice, satisfying them all is virtually impossible. In particular, unrestrictedness of the preference space, and individuality of preferences are such features. Moreover, achieving a satisfactory level of measurement, such as ordinal comparability, and interpersonal comparability are features that require much information about individual preference-structures. As a result, measures of wellbeing based on preference-satisfaction are only feasible at the cost of failing to meet some of their central axiological commitments.

A potential alternative to both preference-satisfaction and the happiness approach that is assessed is the capability approach. The capability approach is a broad evaluative framework that takes people's plural actual doings and being – their functionings – and our ability to choose them – our capabilities – to be the central evaluative aspect of lives. The measurement of

wellbeing is one of the aims of the approach. The capability approach has been formulated as an alternative to both preference-satisfaction approaches and happiness measures, and is committed to the view that our mental states are not always a good source of information about our wellbeing. Moreover, it attempts to incorporate a number of concerns about the plurality of lives in its account, one of which being the fact that certain functionings may be more important to some than to others. In chapter 6 I analyze to what extent these commitments jointly can be realized in the context of wellbeing measurement, and argue this is not the case. As a result, the capability approach must either 1) drop its skepticism of measures of wellbeing based on mental-states, 2) deny that different functionings may matter in different degrees to different individuals, or 3) deny that wellbeing is a measurable concept.

Chapter 7 shifts the discussion from specific approaches to the measurement of wellbeing back to the general question how social scientists should develop measures of wellbeing in light of the disagreement about the nature of the concept. It introduces a term, conceptual uncertainty, to describe this difficulty. The chapter reviews some positions about this problem, one of which is to suggest that different scientific practices can select the philosophical position that best suits their field, given the context. Another position suggests that while there is no agreement on the nature of wellbeing, there may be agreement on a large share of goods that either constitute or contribute to wellbeing, which may be used in scientific practice and policy making. I develop an alternative position, which is based on the idea that while it cannot be expected of measures of wellbeing to be uncontroversial, it can be expected that they are not based on conceptions of wellbeing that are incompatible with all major positions on wellbeing in philosophy. I argue that on the basis of this idea, two central widely shared principles can be defended. The first is an affirmation of the personal nature of wellbeing: whatever wellbeing is on a substantive level, what makes our lives good is highly person-relative. A second principle is a denial of the infallibility of our own ability to assess our own wellbeing. While these two principles create a clear tension in the development of wellbeing measures, I suggest that some social scientists are already developing measures that cut across this tension.

In the final, concluding chapter (8), I go back to my research question, and observe that the argument presents a clear challenge for the measurement of wellbeing. While I have argued that wellbeing is person-relative in a substantive sense, I have also argued that our only methods available for assessing people's person-relative wellbeing information, preference and happiness measurement, are fallible in a significant sense. I present a simple

argument on the basis of the arguments made in the thesis that denies that it is possible to develop a sound, complete measure of wellbeing across contexts. At the same time, I suggest that the importance of the concept of wellbeing warrants scientific attention, and that the lack of an ideal measure should not deter scientists from studying the concept. However, it should inspire social scientists to take a more pluralistic outlook on the measurement of wellbeing, as no single measure should be seen as a gold standard, and all as potentially fallible.

Curriculum Vitae

WILLEM VAN DER DEIJL

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AOS: Ethics, Philosophy of Economics

AOC: Applied Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy, Philosophy of science and social science

ACADEMIC POSITIONS

Postdoctoral fellow **11/2017 - present**
Centre de Recherche en Ethique (CRE), Montreal

PhD Candidate **03/2014 – 10/2017**
Erasmus Institute of Philosophy and Economics and Erasmus School of Economics (EIPE).

- Thesis title: **The measurement of wellbeing in Economics**
- Supervisors: prof. Jack Vromen, Prof. Werner Brouwer, prof. Harry Commandeur

EDUCATION

Visiting studentship **09/2015 – 11/2015**
Cambridge University , Research on well-being in the social sciences, Supervised by Anna Alexandrova

Msc*, Economics and Business,* *Cum Laude* **09/2012 – 02/2014**
Erasmus School of Economics, *Erasmus University Rotterdam*
Average grade 8.3/10 (thesis grade: 9)

MA, Philosophy and Economics (Research) **09/2011 – 09/2013**
Erasmus Institute of Philosophy and Economics, *Erasmus University Rotterdam.* Average grade 8.5/10 (thesis grade: 9)

BA, *Liberal Arts and Sciences,* *Cum Laude* **09/2008 – 06/2011**
Roosevelt Academy Middelburg, Utrecht University (interdepartmental major in Economics, philosophy and statistics). Average Grade: 3.8/4

Academic Exchange **09/2010 – 12/2010**
Glendon College, York University, Toronto, Canada.

PUBLICATIONS (PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES)

- Which problem of adaptation?. *Utilitas*. (available online). doi: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820816000431
- Are measures of well-being philosophically adequate?.*Philosophy of the social sciences* 47(3): 209-234. (2017) doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/0048393116683249
- What happiness science can learn from John Stuart Mill. *International Journal of Wellbeing,* 6(1), 164-179. (2016). doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v6i1.464

PUBLICATIONS (OTHER)

- Review of *Getting what we deserve from our country* (by Fred Feldman, Oxford University Press). *Economics and Philosophy.* (available online, with Huub Brouwer). doi: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266267116000250
- Was the red wedding massacre a good thing?. In Silverman, Eric and Robert Arp eds. *The ultimate game of thrones and philosophy: you think or you die*. Chicago: Open Court. (2016)
- The metaphysical case against Luck Egalitarianism. *Erasmus Student Journal of Philosophy* 3(1), 22-30. (2013)

ACADEMIC WORK IN PROGRESS

- Is pleasure all that is good about mental states? (under review)
- Can there be a capability measure of well-being? (under review)
- Can welfare be measured with a utility-index? (under review)
- What constitutes well-being? Five views on wellbeing in The Netherlands (with Job van Exel, Werner Brouwer, and Maximilian Held; in preparation for revised resubmission).

EDITORIAL WORK

Editor of the Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics — **06/2014 – present**

The Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics (EJPE) is an international peer-reviewed bi-annual academic journal. EJPE has been selected for coverage in Scopus, The philosopher's index, and JEL and EconLit (AEA), and is currently under consideration for Thomson ISI's Social Sciences Citation Index.

PRESENTATIONS (PEER-REVIEWED INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES)

2017

- *Can welfare be measured using preference-satisfaction?* ENPOSS conference, Cracow, September.
- *A Welfarist Account of Adaptive Preference,* INEM Conference, San Sebastian, August.
- *How Desert can Fix Luck Egalitarianism* (with Huub Brouwer), INEM Conference, San Sebastian, August.
- *Is pleasure that is all that is good about experience?* Workshop Virtue and Happiness, Stockholm, May (full paper accepted for presentation)
- *Can utility measures of welfare compete with subjective well-being?* EIPE anniversary conference, March (abstract accepted for presentation)

2016

- *Is pleasure that is all that is good about experience?* OZSW, Groningen, December
- *Is pleasure that is all that is good about experience?* Dutch-Flemish day of philosophy, Leusden, October
- *Can well-being be measured within the capability framework?* HDCA, Tokyo, September
- *What constitutes well-being?* ISQOLS, Seoul, August
- *Can well-being be measured by utilities?* 3rd International Conference Economic Philosophy, Aix-en-Provence, June

2015

- *Well-being intuitionism and conceptual adequacy in well-being science*, OZSW conference, Amsterdam, December
- *Well-being intuitionism and conceptual adequacy in well-being science*, INEM conference, Cape Town, November
- *Well-being intuitionism and conceptual adequacy in well-being science*, EPSA conference, Dusseldorf, September
- *What problem of Adaptation?*. Understanding Value IV, Sheffield, July.
- *Well-being Intuitionism: learning about well-being from philosophers*. Dutch-Flemish day of Philosophy, Groningen, January

2014

- *On the possibility of being a hedonist capability theorist.* OZSW conference, Nijmegen, November

- *What Constitutes Well-being* (co-author: Job van Exel, Werner Brouwer). Multidimensional Subjective Well-Being workshop of the Herbert Simon Society and OECD, Turin, October
- *Edgeworth's dream or Robbins' Nightmare.* ISQOLS Conference, Berlin, September
- *On the possibility of being a hedonist capability theorist.* Human Development and Capability Association Conference, Athens, September
- *The Liberal and the Stringent.* OZSW graduate conference in theoretical philosophy. Amsterdam VU, May
- *The Liberal and the Stringent.* Tilps-EIPE graduate workshop in philosophy of science, Erasmus University Rotterdam, February

2012/13

- *The inevitable sin of data mining*. INEM conference, Rotterdam: Annual meeting of the International Network for Economic Method. June, 2013.
- *Sound Evidence without Theory*. Philosophy of Science in a Forest, Leusden: tri-annual meeting of the Dutch Society for the Philosophy of Science. May, 2013.

PRESENTATIONS (INVITED) AND FORMAL COMMENTS AT SEMINARS

2017

- Comments on *"The Capability Approach - The Capability Approach and Well-Being (ch.4)"* by Ingrid Robeyns, EIPE/UU Ethics Book Symposium, Rotterdam, February.

2016

- Comments on *"Heather Douglas's Account of Values and Evidential Judgments in Scientific Practice"* by Osman Cağlar Dede. EIPE PhD Seminar, December.
- Comments on" *Studying Scientific Representation in Practice? Returning to the London & London Case*" by Jan Potters, GRAT workshop, Antwerp, September
- *What happiness science can learn from John Stuart Mill,* EHERO seminar, Rotterdam, April
- *Are our measures of well-being philosophically adequate?* Lunch time seminar of the Philosophy Faculty, Rotterdam, March
- Comments on "*Kabir's Dilemma: A Note on Hard Choices" by Akshath Jitendranath*. EIPE PhD Seminar, April.

- Comments on "*Nozick's Anarchy, State and Utopia, the Loss of Autonomy: A Critical Account of the Self-Ownership Thesis"* by Fabrizio Ciatti. EIPE PhD seminar, March.
- Comments on "*Defending the asymmetry of desert"* by Huub brouwer. EIPE PhD Seminar, February.

2015

- *What Constitutes Well-being* (co-author: Job van Exel, Werner Brouwer). Health Economics Seminars, Rotterdam, March
- Comments on: "*Betting Odds and Sincere Degrees of Belief"* by Colin Elliot. Tilps-Ghent-EIPE workshop in philosophy, Tilburg, February
- Comments on: *"The space for paternalism in the political theory of Ayn Rand"* by Jojanneke Vanderveen. EIPE PhD seminar, March.

2014

- *Well-being, Happiness and Capabilities: Are the Happiness Approach and the Capability Approach theoretical rivals?* EIPE PhD Seminar. Rotterdam, October.
- *Comments on "On Metaphysical Cases against Political Theories"* by Manuel Buitenhuis. EIPE PhD Seminar, February.

2013/12

- *Comments on* " What Facts Can(not) Do: Constructivism and Facts About Human Nature" by Sem de Maagt. EIPE PhD Seminar. February 2013
- *The metaphysical case against Luck Egalitarianism.* EIPE PhD Seminar. september, 2013.
- *One Hundred Wacky Hypotheses*: *Data Mining as a Problem for statistical testing.* EIPE PhD Seminar. December, 2012.

GRANTS

- Travel Grant ($300), Human Development and Capability Association conference, September 2016, Tokyo, Japan.
- Travel Grant ($227,50), PSA Travel Grant for
- the 25th Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association (PSA2016), November 2016 (not used)
- Travel Grant ($500), Philosophy of Social Science Roundtable, Seattle, May 2015 (not used)

OTHER POSITIONS

Student Assistant of prof. Jack vromen	**06/2015 – 10/2017**
Member of Advisory Council of a national political youth organisation	**04/2014 – 04/2015**

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- *Guest lecture on economic growth and development,* Introduction to Economics (ESHCC, Erasmus University), March 2017
- *Economie and Filosofie*, lecturer (Hogeschool voor de Toegepaste Filosofie), December 2016-January 2017.
- *Quality of life and health*, lecturer, September-October 2016
- *Social, moral, and political philosophy* tutor, June 2016
- *Philosophy of Economics*, tutor, may-June 2016
- *Guest lecture on economic growth and development,* Introduction to Economics (ESHCC, Erasmus University), March 2016
- *Basic income for all*, seminar class in OZSW winter school in philosophy, November 2014
- *Philosophy of Economics*, tutor, may 2014

SERVICE

Refereeing: Journal of Happiness Studies, Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics, Symploke

Co-organizer of the Ghent-Rotterdam-Antwerp-Tilburg graduate workshop (GRATuate)	**14/09/2016**
Organizer and initiator of the EIPE lunch seminar series	**09/2016 – present**
Co-organizer of the OZSW peer-review circle (a national graduate seminar with the purpose of providing presenters with detailed constructive feedback).	**03/2015 – present**
Member of Educational Council (*onderwijscommissie*) of the Philosophy Faculty of the Erasmus University Rotterdam	**06/2014 – present**
Co-organizer of the Eipe-TiLPS Graduate Workshop in Philosophy of Science	**20/02/2014**
Student representative at Erasmus Institute for Philosophy and Economics, organizing the graduate seminar.	**09/2012 – 08/2013**

LANGUAGES

English: Fluent
Dutch: Fluent
French: Intermediate/Good
German: Basic

References

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Alexandrova, Anna, and Daniel M. Haybron. 2012. “High-Fidelity Economics.” In *The Elgar Companion to Recent Economic Methodology*, edited by John B. Davis and D. Wade Hands, 94–199. Northhampton: Edward Elgar.

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Anand, Paul, Jaya Krishnakumar, and Ngoc Bich Tran. 2011. “Measuring Welfare: Latent Variable Models for Happiness and Capabilities in the Presence of Unobservable Heterogeneity.” *Journal of Public Economics* 95 (3): 205–215.

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Priority Setting: Findings of a European Cross-Country Study Using Q Methodology." *Social Science & Medicine* 126: 128–137.
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Fleurbaey, Marc, and Didier Blanchet. 2013. *Beyond GDP: Measuring Welfare and Assessing Sustainability*. New York: Oxford University Press.
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